# BeanScene®

JUNE 2025

A World-Class Coffee Magazine

## THE milk WHISPERER

La Marzocco on a new era of automation

Market consolidation: a good thing for coffee?

*Scott Bennett on 40 years of green bean adventures*

Minor Figures shakes up the alt-milk offering

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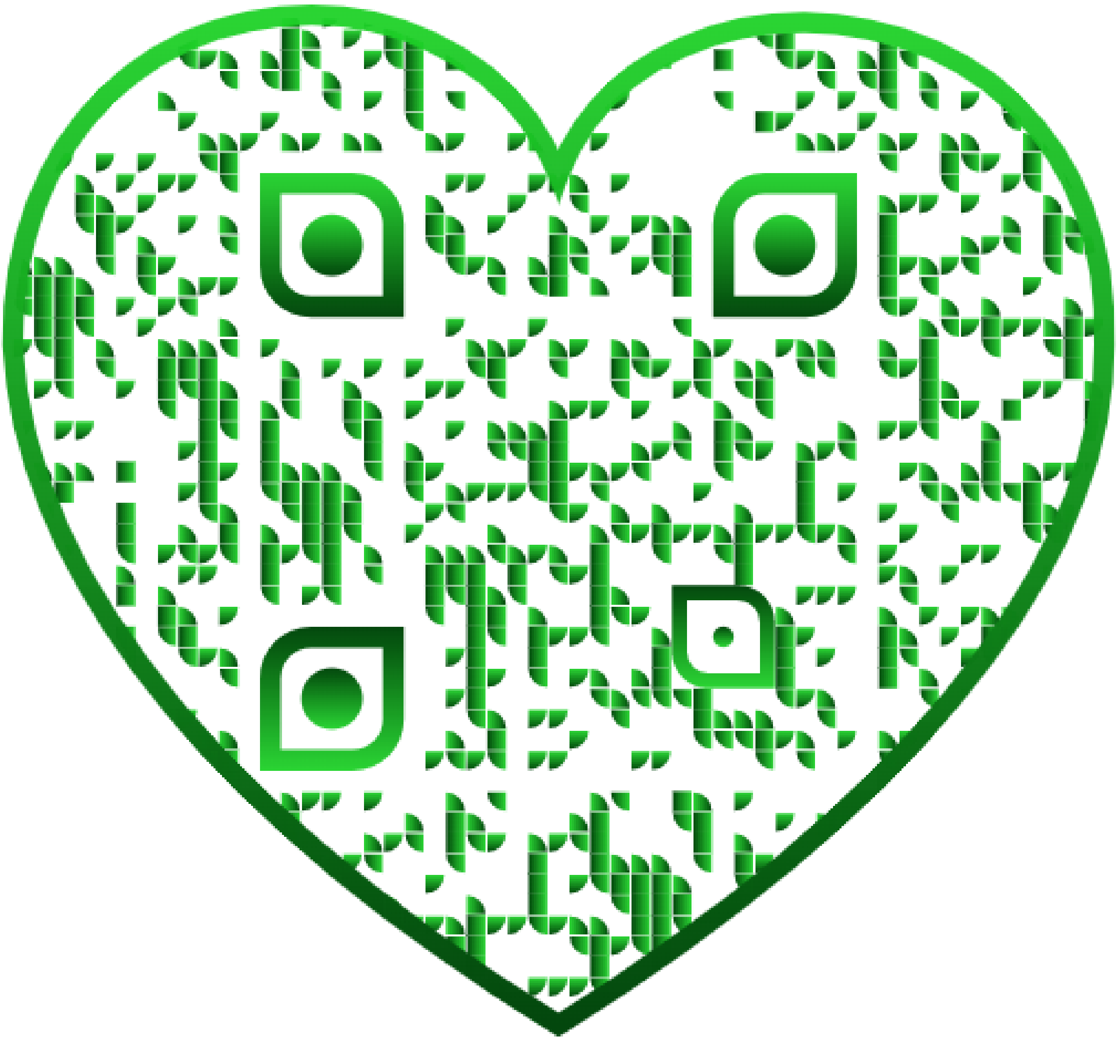

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# BeanScene covershoot

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For this issue's cover shoot, the *BeanScene* team headed to La Marzocco Australia's Melbourne office in Abbotsford. The goal was simple: to photograph its Wally Milk automatic steamer in action.

The light-filled showroom was the ideal spot to capture the Wally Milk doing its thing. Connected to a La Marzocco machine as it would be in a real café setup (a gorgeous cherry-red KB90 for the shoot), *BeanScene* Photographer Blake Storey just had to set up the camera and start snapping.

"La Marzocco is proud to feature Wally Milk on the cover – it's a product that represents our commitment to quality, innovation, and efficiency. Wally Milk brings precision and consistency to milk steaming while elevating the barista customer interaction," says Jets (Anita) Langlands, Head of Marketing at La Marzocco Australia.

"It was meaningful to host the shoot at our Melbourne Showroom: the space is a place of community and connection that showcases the La Marzocco Commercial and Home Range and provides the opportunity to demonstrate our machines and equipment, including the Wally Milk. Capturing the images felt dynamic and natural. It was a true mix of creativity, collaboration, and a shared passion for exceptional coffee and innovation."

Nick Byrne, La Marzocco Australia Bench Tester, was on hand to show off his skills and pour the latte art, which was created using milk steamed by the Wally. In the June cover story, we dive into the intelligent piece of equipment and find out how the automatic steamer can help coffee businesses of all shapes and sizes streamline their workflow. ■

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## Contributors

Each issue of *BeanScene* we profile a few of our talented contributors.

**Victor Vu** is the three-time ASCA Australian Latte Art Champion. He placed seventh in the 2024 World Latte Art Championip (WLAC) in Denmark in June. Born in Vietnam, Victor worked for three years in hospitality before coming to Australia to perfect his latte art skills. He won the 2018 Milklab Barista Battle, and the 2020, 2024, and 2025 ASCA Australian Latte Art Championships. He currently works at Ona Coffee Melbourne.

**Emma McDougall** is the Communication and Administration Coordinator for the NZSCA. After gaining a degree in hospitality management, Emma has worked in Sydney, Dublin, Auckland, London, and, most recently, Wellington. She has owned and managed cafés and tech-judged the New Zealand Barista Championship in 2015 and 2016. Now, she gets to help run them. One of the greatest joys she gets from the coffee industry is watching young people progress through their coffee journey.

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BeanScene Magazine

# The future of coffee

How will we be consuming our morning cup of coffee in 2050? Will the latte continue to be the serve of choice in Australia and the flat white in New Zealand, and will consumers shift even further to a domestic preparation model or will there be a revival of independent café culture?

Certainly, a lot has changed over the past 25 years. In 2000, the third-wave coffee movement was in its infancy and instant or filter coffee was the norm for many in the region. The majority of coffee drinkers hadn't heard of the term 'flat white' and milk-based serves meant a splash at most. Alternatives were largely the preserve of vegans and the lactose intolerant, with options mostly limited to soy or rice.

Scott Bennett has witnessed the coffee industry evolve over the past 40 years. The Managing Director of H.A. Bennett & Sons was recently awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Coffee Industry Heroes event, and in this issue reflects on his career, his adventures at origin around the world, and the progression of Australia's coffee industry.

Seeing how much has changed in the past quarter century, it's almost impossible to predict how we'll be enjoying coffee in 25 years' time. As a race, humans have never been great at foreseeing future inventions anyway – we're still waiting for the hover board to take off and a city on Mars is yet to be established.

But, we are living in an era in which innovation and technology are developing at a rate never seen before. Who knows, perhaps the robot baristas recently introduced in Auckland by Chinese company Shanghai Hi-Dolphin Robot Technology will be the norm across the world in 10 years' time?

While 2050 may be too far off to make any realistic forecasts, the team at La Marzocco have recently completed a body of research that studies the near future of coffee in Australia. In this issue's cover story, we dive into the report and explore how quality coffee is expanding from the café setting and how automation and new technology is helping hospitality business owners navigate industry challenges.

With the continuation of high green-bean prices and changing consumer preferences, some experts are predicting increased consolidation in the coffee market, with a growing number of large roasters acquiring smaller operations, and café groups rolling out across the country. To explore the phenomenon, we spoke to several industry professionals to find out what's happening on the ground in Australia and New Zealand, and ask if consolidation is good or bad for the industry (spoiler: everyone has their own verdict).

There's lots more to sink your teeth into in this edition of *BeanScene*, including new product launches from Barista Group, Minor Figures, and Slayer.
Enjoy the issue.

KATHRYN LEWIS
**EDITOR**
**BeanScene Magazine**

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## 2025 World Coffee Roasting Champion crowned

World Coffee Championships 2025
WORLD COFFEE ROASTING CHAMPIONSHIP
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Image: SCA.

The World Coffee Championships has crowned France's Mikaël Portannier as the 2025 World Coffee Roasting Champion at the Specialty Coffee Expo in Houston, United States.

Texture Coffee representative Mikaël defeated 22 other competitors in the four-day championship, including Australian representative Amber (Ning Chi) Cheng of Code Black Coffee who finished fifth in a tightly contested field.

Mikaël, however, earned a comprehensive victory with his final score of 569 points. His closest competitor, Taiwan's Ashton Huang, finished in second with 551 points.

The podium was rounded out by Thailand's Naruepon Wuttipappinyo who finished with a score of 546.

In a post on Instagram, Mikaël thanked the coffee community.

"I don't carry this title alone. It's the result of immense and sincere support," he says.

"I am deeply grateful to the French coffee community – your energy carried me all the way to Houston. Thank you to my wife Chloé, my pillar of support, for her unwavering support. To my friends Damien and Dajo, there every step of the way, in training and on the journey."

## Zarraffa's Coffee expands with South Australia acquisition

FIRST THINGS FIRST
EST 2016
COFFEE
WALK UP WINDOW

Image: Zarraffa's Coffee.

Zarraffa's Coffee has announced its first foray into the South Australian market through the "multi-million dollar" acquisition of drive-thru specialty coffee chain First Things First.

The coffee retailer will take ownership of First Things First's four existing sites in the Adelaide suburbs of Enfield, Salisbury Downs, Woodville Park, and Holden Hill ahead of the opening of its first Adelaide store at Munno Para.

It currently operates 80 stores across New South Wales, Western Australia, and its home market of Queensland.

Zarraffa's Coffee Managing Director and Founder Kenton Campbell says the business' move to South Australia is part of the company's target to launch in new regions over the next 12 months.

"Our journey into South Australia has been a long time coming," Kenton says. "We have had our sights set on Adelaide from the very beginning, and now that we have reached the right stage in our growth plans, we're excited to finally make this moment happen.

"This move has been thoughtfully considered and a way to align and accelerate our expansion into the state, integrating with a team that already shares our passion for good quality coffee and community. We will be opening the doors to our first flagship Zarraffa's Coffee store in the northern suburb of Munno Para later this year and look forward to introducing Zarraffa's to a whole new region of coffee lovers."

## Auckland welcomes duo of robot cafés

Auckland coffee drinkers are embracing robotic technology to get a quick coffee fix, so much so a pair of robot baristas from Chinese company Shanghai Hi-Dolphin Robot Technology have taken the city by storm.

Due to the success of the company's first COFE+ machine at Queen's Court in January, a second machine has now been installed at Newmarket.

COFE+ has partnered with local business Aoraki Coffee to supply its beans, including its Ken's Choice and 1960's Vintage blends.

Its machines are located in more 35 countries across the world and 15 provinces in China. Version 1.0 of the COFE+ robot coffee kiosk was launched in 2018. Now on its V5 model, COFE+ says it has perfected its machine learning due to the production of more than two million coffees over the past seven years. It is capable of producing a coffee in less than 60 seconds.

Queen's Court has described the robotic café as a "step into the future".

"COFE+ Robot Café, located in Auckland CBD, offers a unique unmanned coffee experience where drinks are crafted by state-of-the-art robot baristas," it says.

"In this innovative café, the traditional barista is replaced by cutting-edge technology, ensuring precision and consistency in every cup."

COFE+ 机器人咖啡亭

Image: COFE+.

## Big changes announced for Q Grader Program

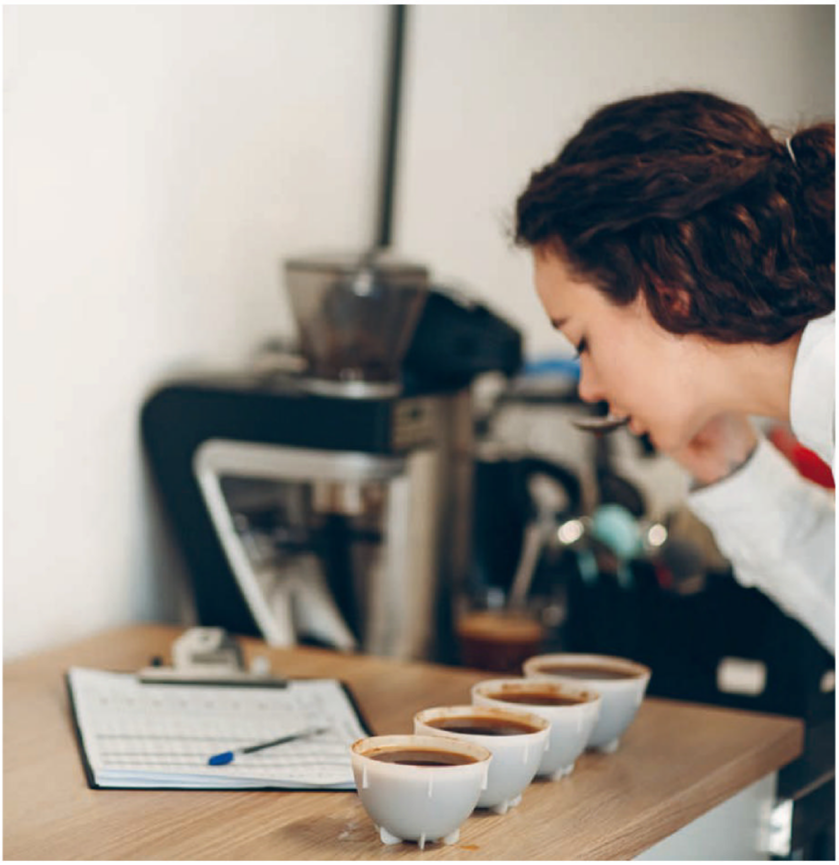

Image: primipil/stock.adobe.com.

The Specialty Coffee Association (SCA) has announced new changes to the Q Grader Program in tandem with the Coffee Quality Institute (CQI) to provide better support and more accessible education opportunities across the coffee industry.

As of 1 October 2025, SCA will be operating an evolved Q Grader Program based on its Coffee Value Assessment (CVA), which was introduced in 2023 and expands coffee assessment to encompass flavour and other attributes.

The program is designed for professional cuppers and coffee assessors, with participants set to learn practical techniques in sensory evaluation, green coffee defect identification, and quality control in a research-informed curriculum. Students will become licensed Q Graders upon completion.

SCA CEO Yannis Apostolopoulos says the program will set a new standard in coffee evaluation practices.

"Coffee is more than a score," he says. "The partnership between SCA and CQI to evolve the Q Grader program is the latest milestone towards delivering on the SCA's purpose to make coffee better.

"Upon completion of the program, Q Graders holding the evolved, CVA-based licence will set the standard for modern coffee evaluation. Through a system that takes a holistic view in the value of coffee, they'll play a key role in driving progress in the global specialty coffee industry."

CQI will no longer be involved in the operation of the Q once it transitions to the new program. CQI CEO Michael Sheridan has expressed the institute's pride of its two decades of involvement in the program's development.

## % Arabica to open Australian flagship

% ARABICA
CAFÉS DO BRASIL
KONA ARABICA FARM

Image: tang90246/stock.adobe.com.

Japanese specialty coffee brand % Arabica has signed a lease to open its first Australian flagship store in Bondi, Sydney.

On 20 April, 'Coming Soon' signage was put up at the venue on the corner of Hall Street and Campbell Parade, which is due to open in late 2025. The brand also set up a % Arabica Australia Instagram page, including a post featuring the Bondi location, with the Australian venue also confirmed on its website.

The Japanese coffee brand was established by Kenneth Shoji in Kyoto in 2014. The roastery current has 224 venues across the world, with new locations due to open this year in Nepal, Spain, and Iraq alongside Australia. Most of its current venues are located in Asia and the Middle East.

On the brand's website, Founder Kenneth Shoji said: "Our dream is to grow % Arabica across unique lands and cultures of the world, so that we can 'See the World Through Coffee'. We only live once, so let's explore the world we live in, set goals, and enjoy our time together over an amazing cup of coffee."

## Single O launches new day-to-night venue in Japan

Sydney coffee roaster Single O has opened its "mothership" café in Kanda Awajicho, Japan.

The full-service venue, which launched on Thursday 24 April, is the brand's first day-to-night flagship café. After a decade in the Japanese market, the specialty coffee roaster has expanded its offering, serving cocktails and wine alongside its food menu.

"We're excited to open our newest Single O location in Kanda. We've been in Japan for over 10 years now, and it's unreal to be part of specialty coffee's growth here and support a thriving independent café scene," says Mike Brabant, CEO of Single O.

"It's a sister to our Surry Hills site in Sydney, seating a community of coffee lovers, locals, and travellers alike. We're calling it the Mothership and we hope people will come in, discover something new, and feel at home – whether they're here for our signature Reservoir St flat white, experience the latest single origin on tap from our producer partners around the world, or grab an after work drink."

Located in Kanda Awajicho, the new Single O is venue is in the heart of culture and modernity, with the area providing a central hub for coffee-lovers, locals, and tourists.

Image: Single O.

Continued pressure in the coffee industry could be influencing a rise in market consolidation. Image: Stephane Debove/stock.adobe.com.

# Consolidation nation

Will the continued pressure of high green-bean prices result in further consolidation in the coffee industry, or will Australia and New Zealand's independent spirit persevere?

Acquisitions are nothing new in the international coffee industry. From Coca-Cola's purchase of United Kingdom café chain Costa Coffee for AU$7.58 billion in 2019 to Nestlé's acquisition of Blue Bottle Coffee in the United States for $1.1 billion in 2017, there's big business in large companies taking over smaller ones.

Yet, the continued pressure the coffee industry faces from high green-bean prices, supply issues, and the rise of domestic consumers – among many other factors – means an increasing number of roasteries and cafés are struggling to make ends meet. According to International Coffee Consultant and former Nestlé executive Gerd Mueller-Pfeiffer, large coffee companies are using the challenges as an opportunity to purchase struggling businesses to increase their footprint and improve their purchasing power.

"I believe we'll see more consolidation in the international coffee market over the next few years. There are hundreds of acquisitions every year and they're not always the big guys like Nestlé or Lavazza – the majority are on a much smaller scale," says Gerd.

> "COFFEE PRICES ARE STILL HIGH AND MANY SMALLER COFFEE COMPANIES ARE STRUGGLING TO MEET THE BOTTOM LINE AND RUNNING INTO FINANCIAL TROUBLE."

"Coffee prices are still high and many smaller coffee companies are struggling to meet the bottom line and running into financial trouble. While some larger companies will use this as an opportunity to scale up, I don't believe we'll end up in a situation in which five or six very big companies are dictating the coffee world."

While many of the most prominent examples are large coffee roasters, this is a trend being witnessed throughout the supply chain – from international green bean merchants to mid-size roasters to small café chains.

"I speculate we'll see more consolidation in coffee trading. Due to the financing model of merchants, some are experiencing financial problems because they're not running on a strong P&L," Gerd says.

"I think we'll see more direct models of coffee trading, with more producers skipping the middleman and distributing products directly into consumer consumption countries."

## REGIONAL MOVEMENTS AND MERGERS

Over the past few years there have been a string of coffee acquisitions in Australia and New Zealand.

In 2021, international coffee and tea

company JDE Peet's purchased Sydney's Campos Coffee, while global drinks brand Asahi Beverages acquired Auckland original Allpress Espresso. In 2022, Toby's Estate joined UCC Holdings when the Japanese group acquired Suntory Coffee Australia for almost $250 million.

In late 2024, Gloria Jean's parent company Retail Food Group acquired South Australian coffee shop franchise CIBO Espresso for $2.7 million to accelerate the growth of Gloria Jean's in the region. More recently, in February 2025, Coffee Supreme invested in Sydney specialty brand Gabriel Coffee, while in April Zarraffa's Coffee acquired drive-thru specialty coffee chain First Things First in South Australia.

In a statement at the time, Gabriel Coffee Founder Sam Garbielian said: "My decision to partner with a renowned brand like Coffee Supreme has been a long and thoughtful journey.

"After years of discussions with [Coffee Supreme CEO] Andrew Low, it became clear that our shared values and vision made this partnership the right move. I'm excited to continue doing what I love as Head of Coffee for Australia while also remaining a shareholder in the combined business."

While Australia and New Zealand have long been proud of the café cultures they've built based on independent business, is consolidation in the market an inherently bad thing? Or could it be one of the keys to saving an industry that's struggling in challenging times?

> "WE HAVE CAFÉS NOT MAKING MONEY, ROASTERS NOT MAKING MONEY, AND FARMERS NOT MAKING MONEY. SO, WE ASKED OURSELVES, 'WHAT WE CAN DO AS A ROASTER TO IMPROVE THAT DYNAMIC?'."

Andrew Low, CEO of Coffee Supreme, believes some acquisitions of smaller coffee roasters in the region will be necessary for the long-term health of the sector.

"As an industry we face unprecedented cost increases, not just in green beans but also rent and utilities. The ability for small roasters to make a sustainable profit while base costs are so high is very difficult," Andrew says.

"In our view, coffee's value chain is broken. Currently, we have cafés not making money, roasters not making money, and farmers not making money. So, we asked ourselves, 'what we can do as a roaster to improve that dynamic?'."

For the Coffee Supreme team, the answer was economy of scale. Andrew says acquiring businesses enables roasters to reduce their fixed costs, become more efficient, create a more automated process, and maintain a very high coffee standard.

"Doing this means we pass less of the higher costs onto our customers than other roasters that are less efficient. As an organisation, it's your job to square your house away first before passing on costs to your customers," he says.

"As well as utilising economy of scale, acquiring a company like Gabriel Coffee is also a method to bring talent into the business. And we were fortunate enough to do both."

## MORE INVESTMENT TO COME

Aligned with Gerd, Andrew believes we'll see more larger roasters acquiring and investing in smaller operations over the next few years. He says the roasting landscape today is completely different to that of the 2010s when the independent coffee industry was booming.

"In 2012, the ability to buy a small roaster and set up in a warehouse was a reasonably low cost of entry, therefore

Gerd Mueller-Pfeiffer is an ex-Nestlé Executive Officer and International Coffee Consultant. Image: Gerd Mueller-Pfeiffer.

Andrew Low is the CEO of Coffee Supreme. Image: Coffee Supreme.

you didn't need a huge balance sheet to be successful. Green bean prices were also a lot lower then, so there were a lot of good roasters making solid cash," he says.

"However, three things have happened since those days. Firstly, competition has got aggressively high, with many roasters trying to compete for the same piece of pie. There's also too many cafés fighting for the customer voice, so that's creating economic return challenges for us roasters because when you put a coffee machine on a bench it's now doing 20 kilograms instead of 30. And finally, coffee prices have gone up significantly. Few small businesses are making money like they used to."

While Andrew believes there will be more consolidation within the roasting sector, he doesn't see the region's café scenes going towards a more European or North American model in which huge chains reign supreme.

"I don't see a situation where you can go from the largest established independent market in the world to a consolidated chain environment – that seems very unlikely. Starbucks and equivalents have tried to break the Australian and New Zealand markets and haven't done well, having to fold back," he says.

"What I do think we'll see is a decline in the number of cafés. When I first started at Toby's Estate in 2009, there were around 5000 independent cafés in Australia. Today, there's around 25,000. Some of those won't make it, but the sector will tighten up to fewer but better venues, which is probably a good thing. It's market correction."

Localised chains have become more prominent over the past decade. Café groups with store prints between 10 and 20 venues are proving successful in the larger cities such as Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane.

"With a footprint of around 15 to 20 stores, the venue can still bring its local style and at scale the owner can negotiate better prices for ingredients and other essentials. That allows them to be sustainable and not too expensive, so I think we'll see more of this," Andrew says.

"The only variable that none of us know is whether further automation of the coffee machine industry will drive us closer to a chain-based model in terms of quality of drink construction. With increased automation, you become less reliant on an expert barista and more on the technology. I do think that keeps the door open to the more cookie-cutter models than we've had before."

## COLLECTIVE INDEPENDENT ACTION

In December 2024, a collective of independent Adelaide cafés came together for an advertising campaign to encourage coffee lovers to support small businesses in the city. The campaign was launched by local marketing and communications agency Topbunk in response to the acquisition of CIBO Espresso by Gloria Jeans' parent company.

Ryan Spellman, owner of Spellmans' Social, was one of the independent venues to get behind the campaign.

"We jumped at the opportunity to be involved in this campaign as it is finally shining a light on an issue that has been affecting our business and many other local independent businesses like us for the past three years. This is more than local or federal governments have offered us when we have been crying out for help while more and more local businesses are being forced into closure every week," says Ryan.

"Independent businesses create so much for the local economy and communities surrounding them. We buy from local suppliers, employ locally, and service the local community."

Since the campaign, Ryan has sold his business. He says the cost-of-living crisis was a major factor in his decision, as well as competition from restaurant and pub groups in the area that have diversified into serving specialty coffee and casual food.

"We are in the fortunate position that we were able to sell the business and pass it on, but there are a lot of other local horror stories of café owners who have spent a lot of money on a venue and can't get out of a lease," he says.

"We started Spellman's Social in 2021 and have created a great community here. We were attracting new customers and welcomed back regulars, but the average spend was dropping while all the running costs were doubling. At the same time, restaurant and pub groups in Adelaide were diversifying, serving coffee, grab-and-go food items, and cakes in the day, and staying open into the evening."

Despite his decision to walk away and explore a new avenue while still young, Ryan believes there's still opportunity for independent coffee businesses in South Australia and beyond.

"Across the board, independent businesses are coming together to try and make things work. Brands are getting creative and partnering with other like-minded businesses to share spaces and ideas," he says.

"There's enough media attention out there now that most consumers understand that small businesses are struggling with the huge increase in overheads and coffee prices going up. If businesses can hang in there, I think the world will level up and everyone can keep trying to live their dream."

> "MOST CONSUMERS UNDERSTAND THAT SMALL BUSINESSES ARE STRUGGLING WITH THE HUGE INCREASE IN OVERHEADS AND COFFEE PRICES GOING UP"

## GOOD FOR THE CONSUMER?

So, can consolidation be a positive for the greater good of the coffee industry? Gerd says there's no clear-cut answer.

"Sometimes yes, but quite often no. As a consumer, you could be confronted with higher pricing from venues due to the fact they have less competition," he says.

"The beauty of the coffee industry is having the local coffee shops, the local ideas, and the local tastes."

For Andrew, there are both pros and cons to consolidation in the local coffee market.

"Consumers want choice, but consolidation brings familiarity and consistency," he says.

"However, the markets in Australia and New Zealand have expanded aggressively and as a result I think around 10 to 15 per cent of independent coffee shops aren't producing excellent coffee. This lowers people's perceptions and encourages them to think they can make better at home.

"I do think consolidation of a small number of roasters and a small number of cafés ultimately increases average quality and customer satisfaction, which as a result makes the industry stronger. At this time, there's a natural need to trim the tail."

It's hard to predict what will happen next for the Australasian coffee industry, but looking at other similar markets around the world consolidation is on the mind of many of the major players.

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The team at Spellman's Social admiring the advertising campaign promoting independent business. Image: Topbunk.

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# Keeping it in the family

Scott Bennett, Chairman of H.A. Bennett & Sons. Images: Bennetts Coffee.

Fresh from being honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Coffee Industry Heroes 2025, Scott Bennett reflects on more than 40 years in green coffee and the future of the industry in Australia and beyond.

Scott Bennett could fill a book with his intrepid stories of visiting coffee farms around the world. From tear-jerking to terrifying moments, the now Chairman of green coffee trader H.A. Bennett & Sons has spent the past four decades traversing the globe to source the best beans for Australia's prospering coffee sector.

"I have had some fantastic experiences over the years, but there have also been life-threatening moments – I've seen crazy things happen," Scott tells *BeanScene*.

"When I go back to countries, the first impressions are very enduring and each origin is unique. Take Brazil, for example, it's something to behold because it's so modern in a lot of respects. The lineage of coffee growers runs through generations of families, and they are so passionate and knowledgeable about their craft. It is quite extraordinary."

## STARTING YOUNG

For Scott, an adventurous spirit for travel was instilled at an early age. As a young child in the late 1960s, his first overseas trips were to Sri Lanka, India, and Indonesia, accompanying his father William (Bill) Bennett on business trips. In 1960, Bill had taken over the family tea and coffee trading company from his father Horace Albert Bennett, who started trading in 1918 at the end of the First World War.

One of six sons, in the 1960s Bill forged a relationship with historic tea brand Lipton, which had established its first Australian tea-packing factory in Melbourne. While the company introduced Australia to the teabag, as its tea broker Bennetts continued to build on the sourcing legacy Horace Albert Bennett had established after the war.

"Visiting places such as India and Sri Lanka at the age of five or six was completely eye opening. The sights, smells, and hectic nature of those countries was exciting and so different to home," Scott says.

"Yet, it didn't seem so extraordinary to me as I was used to people from those countries coming to visit us in Australia. As a young child, I was exposed to the business in a lot of ways and over my childhood there was a subtle education in tea and coffee trading."

While there was always the option for Scott to join the family business, it wasn't until he turned 17 that he decided he would

Scott in Papua New Guinea in 1984.

try working with his father. At the time in the 1980s, Bennetts was still trading more tea than coffee, but the coffee bean side of the business was starting to grow. After a year or so working alongside his father, at the age of 19 Scott was given the opportunity to work at an exporting company in Papua New Guinea (PNG).

"As a 19 year old I was doing something very different from most of my friends. Although I'd spent time in places such as Fiji and Vanuatu, stepping off the plane in PNG it was very different," he says.

"I was working for the largest coffee exporter at the time and the idea was to go out there for three months and help during the coffee season. I was based at the head office where we did all the blending for export and quality testing."

With a bigger coffee harvest than expected, Scott's three-month stint turned into three years. During that time, he got involved with buying beans at the warehouse door as well as from producers and coffee mills all over the country. He also cupped and graded coffees, and developed an understanding of the industry at all levels. It was a truly hands-on experience.

## HOMECOMING

In 1986, Scott and Bill decided it was time for him to come home and help run the family business. In the time he'd been away, Bennetts had lost a significant amount of its tea business through multinational takeovers and tea-packing moving overseas. However, coffee was starting to take off in Australia.

"The big change happened in the late 1980s when the International Coffee Agreement was disbanded and coffee became a free market globally. It meant we could import coffee from anywhere in the world," says Scott.

Another pivotal moment for the Australian coffee industry, according to Scott, was the Sydney Summer Olympics in 2000.

"Until this point, people in Australia were mainly drinking instant coffee or filter coffee. But the late 1990s/early 2000s is when espresso really started to kick off. At this time, we imported most of our coffee from PNG because of the contacts we had there, but we were also importing from India and Indonesia through Dad's tea contacts," he says.

"In those days, the idea of Brazilian coffee was quite foreign – as was Colombian, which traders wouldn't have dared travel to because of security issues. Air travel to South and Central America didn't really become commonplace until the late 1990s, and meeting the producers was a huge part of business in those days. We didn't have email or instant messenger apps to communicate with them – fax was our main method other than visiting origin."

In the late 2000s, the industry started to open up to a whole range of international origins. As third-wave coffee started to take root in cafés in Melbourne and Sydney, Scott and team began to broaden their sourcing horizons.

"In the early 2010s, we started to see the rise of specialty coffee and single origins. People wanted to try something unique and roast differently," Scott says.

"At this point, Melbourne and Sydney bought different types of coffees. Sydney used a lot of Colombian coffee while Melbourne still used a lot of PNG and lighter balanced coffees because of the different water qualities. The water in Sydney is a bit limier, whereas Victoria has clean water coming out of its hills. Nowadays, the two cities are much more aligned with the types of coffees used in blends."

The global nature of the world today means almost all coffee origins have been explored, with coffee fans in Australia being able to choose from a globetrotting selection. While Scott doesn't believe there are any truly untapped gems left to be discovered, there are four producing countries that still "blow his mind".

"From Ethiopia, you can get some incredibly delicate floral coffees, which can be very distinctive based on the region in which they're grown. I've always been a fan of Guatemalan coffees too, as their regions are also unique in the cup" he says.

"PNG is still a long-time favourite, as very well grown, managed, and produced coffees can be exceptional – although they are incredibly hard to find nowadays. And finally, in Colombia we are starting to see a lot of coffee regions that are re-emerging after being lost for decades."

## ROLLERCOASTER ECONOMICS

While the coffee industry in Australia continued to prosper in the late 2010s, the turn of the decade saw a number of hurdles challenge its growth. Following COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, coffee now faces market volatility never seen before. Scott believes there's not enough discussion in the industry about what's really happening to the value of coffee.

"If you look at the export statistics

Scott in Ethiopia in 2015.

Scott (right) in Brazil in 2024 with sons Alex (second left) and Tom (second right).

for Vietnam, the world's second biggest producer of coffee, over the past five to six years their production numbers are flat lining, if not trending down. In the late 1990s/early 2000s, the country received a lot of investment through the World Bank to plant a huge amount of coffee trees, which saw production skyrocket," he says.

"However, we're now 30-35 years on and many of those trees haven't been replaced. Like humans, coffee trees get less productive over time. Many of those trees are now towards the end of their lifespan, which will need huge investment to replant them.

Scott believes production in Vietnam has peaked as the world's demand for coffee continues to grow by millions of bags each year. Many people look to Brazil to fill the gap, yet he says the country has its own production issues.

"There are also a lot of things that need to be invested in in Brazil, such as labour issues, the cost of planting new coffee farms, and climate change, to name a few," he says.

"And when you look at the other producing countries around the world, I don't think there are any that are up to the challenge. Ten years ago, it was said Colombia would be producing 20 million bags per year by now, but today it's only at around 14 million."

From a production point of view, Scott believes the market volatility will continue as coffee producing countries struggle to keep up with international demand. However, he doesn't believe it will greatly impact the cost for consumers.

"The vast majority of the money is made at the cup end of the supply chain. Focusing purely on the coffee ingredient – not considering milk, labour, and such – the cost of the coffee hasn't gone up hugely when considering the whole price of the final cup," he says.

> "THERE IS GOOD NEWS OUT THERE, BUT THESE PROJECTS TAKE YEARS TO DEVELOP, SCALE UP, AND ROLL OUT, SO PEOPLE AREN'T TALKING ABOUT THEM."

"What we need to do is incentivise farmers. They need to receive more money for their product and be able to make a living out of it. Without that, they won't replant trees, and their children won't want to follow in their footsteps. If a coffee tree is removed from the ground in a producing country, it's very rare that it goes back in – it will be replaced with sugarcane, bananas, or something else that's less labour intensive and more productive."

## REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

Despite the huge shared challenge the international coffee industry faces, Scott believes there are still plenty of reasons to be optimistic about the future in Australia and beyond.

"Global coffee consumption is going up and in Australia it's now a daily habit – and that's hard to break. The coffee industry isn't going to disappear," he says.

"There's a huge amount of work being done in the coffee producing sector to develop new coffee varieties and processing methods. There is good news out there, but these projects take years to develop, scale up, and then roll out, so people aren't talking about them as much as something immediate like the price of Arabica on the coffee market that day."

As Scott approaches four and a half decades at Bennetts and in the green coffee business, he says there have been many highlights – including being awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Coffee Industry Heroes in March 2025.

"It took me back as I wasn't expecting it at all," he says.

"Over my time, one thing I've really enjoyed is bringing new coffees to Australia and introducing them to the industry here. It was amazing to introduce roasters to origins they'd never tried before and being able to open their eyes to something new. Today, many roasters still have those coffees as part of their offering."

Scott is now starting to hand over the reins of the business to his three sons – Alex, Tom, and Sam – who have all spent time at the company.

"The fourth generation is starting to come through, which is incredible to witness," he says. "The generational nature of the coffee industry is something you see at every point in the supply chain – from growers to traders – which is a nice tradition to continue." ▪

Wally Milk acts as an independent milk steamer, providing an additional steam wand for busy setups. Image: Prime Creative Media.

# Wally, the milk whisperer

The coffee industry in Australia is shifting and forward-thinking companies like La Marzocco are developing equipment to keep up with the evolving market. Meet Wally Milk, the automatic milk steamer that's turning automation sceptics into believers.

At the end of March 2025, La Marzocco published a first-of-its-kind body of research on Australian coffee culture. The result of interviews with leading figures in the coffee and hospitality industries, data from trusted sources, and insights from the senior team at La Marzocco Australia, the *Future of Coffee Report* outlines coffee's key challenges and opportunities.

The 24-page report covers a huge range of topics, from trends and their opportunities to how innovative equipment is evolving the workflow of baristas. Yet, for La Marzocco Australia Managing Director Barry Moore, the most prominent finding was the rising consumer preference for specialty coffee's influence on hospitality businesses' approach.

"In 2025, serving a good cup of coffee is no longer enough: it has to be exceptional. Customers are increasingly willing to pay a premium for high-quality, ethically sourced coffee, and that means businesses must step up their game in sourcing, brewing, and service quality," says Barry.

"Whether it's a small neighbourhood café or a high-end hotel, coffee can significantly enhance the customer experience and drive repeat business."

Over the past decade and thanks to the strong specialty coffee culture established in Australia, consumers have come to expect quality coffee in all manner of venues. While cafés continue to set the standard, other hospitality settings, businesses, and corporate spaces have followed suit to offer an excellent cup.

"For a long time, coffee in Australia and especially in places like Melbourne has been tied to brunch culture. Enjoying a good coffee often meant sitting down for a while and spending a greater amount of money," says Brydon Price, La Marzocco Australia National Sales Manager.

"But coffee culture has evolved and specialty coffee has become a product for everyone in a huge range of settings. Today, there's no reason to accept bad coffee because good coffee is available almost everywhere. Whereas previously venues like hotels, restaurants, and offices were often left behind, they are now rapidly playing catch up as consumers expect quality coffee everywhere they go."

One of the major focuses of the report was how automation and innovative equipment would shape the future of the café industry in Australia. The report found businesses are increasingly utilising automation to ensure consistency and efficiency, with the adoption of automated equipment on the rise. Technology is helping baristas optimise their workflow, giving them more time to focus on the customer experience rather than making manual adjustments.

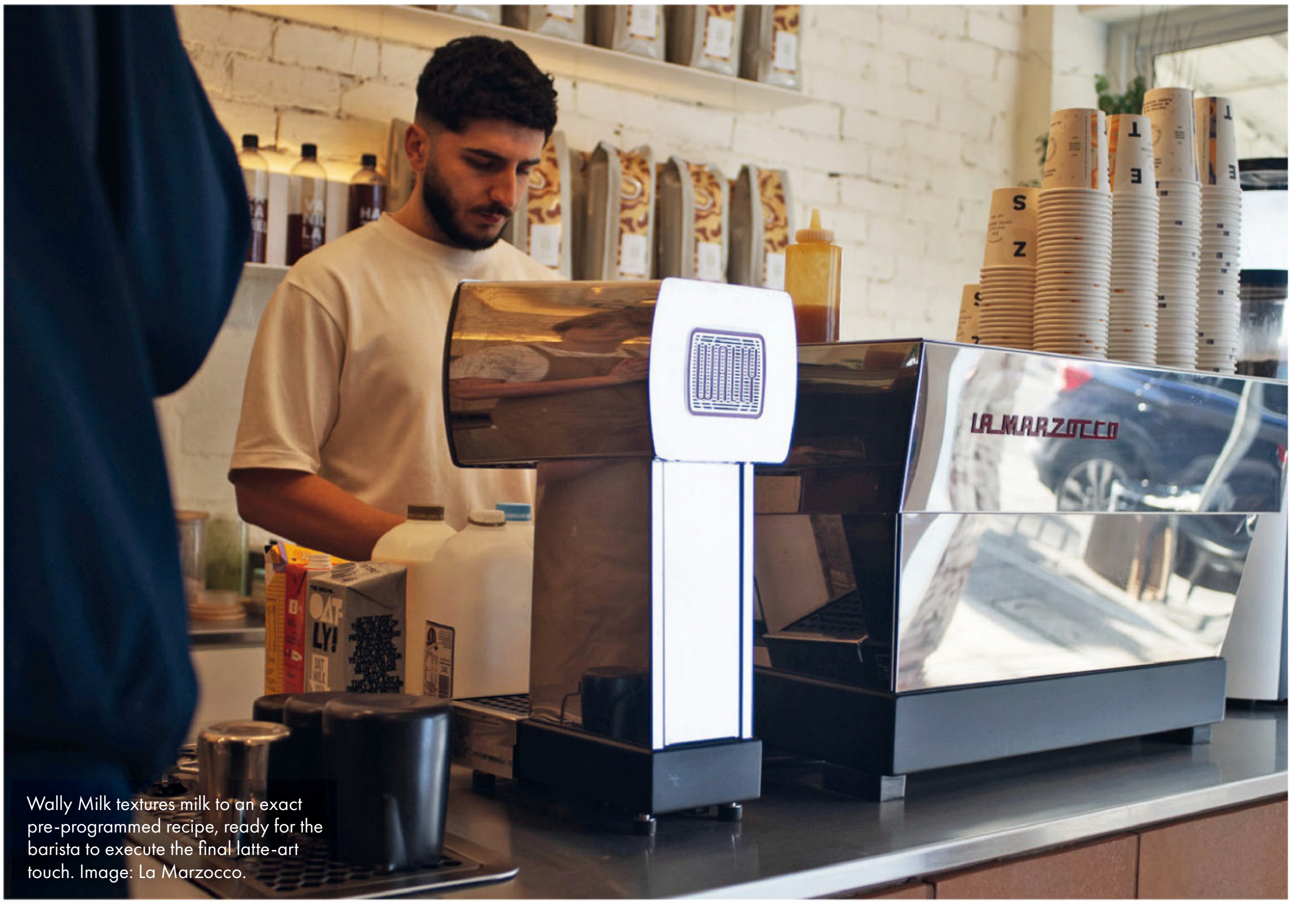
"It's often assumed there's a resistance to innovation in espresso technology and there's a fear around a tipping point in automation. However, we've found there's an openness to embrace this innovation," says Brydon.

"For example, we've recently connected many of our espresso machines and grinders to the cloud, which has been very popular with roasters who want this kind of data. Traditionally, data hasn't meant a lot in the coffee industry and people haven't known how to use it, but the industry has advanced and modernised, and these stats are now being used to increase profitability, consistency, and efficiency."

## MEET WALLY MILK

For La Marzocco Australia, one such innovation that's been embraced by the local industry is its Wally Milk automatic milk steamer. The independent piece of equipment acts as an additional steam wand, texturing the milk to an exact pre-programmed recipe, ready for the barista

Consumers in Australia now expect to find quality coffee in all manner of settings. Image: La Marzocco.



Wally Milk textures milk to an exact pre-programmed recipe, ready for the barista to execute the final latte-art touch. Image: La Marzocco.

to execute the final latte-art touch. It can be connected to all professional La Marzocco and Modbar machines, as well as most other commercial espresso machines.

"Wally isn't a coffee robot, rather an extension of the coffee machine a venue already has. It's a third steam wand exactly where you need it to be," say Brydon. "Once the barista presses the button, the Wally does the rest of the task of steaming the milk."

The Wally can be programmed with up to 20 recipes for different milk alternatives, temperatures, and levels of aeration. While it's handy to have so many recipes available at the touch of a button, Brydon says most venues only rely on three or four because of the Wally's vortex steam tip.

"The simplicity of the Wally is one of its greatest selling points. While it's capable of running 20 recipes, most users can get everything done with just three – they only need to select how hot and foamy they like the milk," he says.

"This is because you can use the same recipe for every type of milk, even oat milk. The vortex steam tip swirls the milk quite aggressively, which for alternative milks means they will be stretched and textured for a longer period, producing a uniform milk foam that won't split in the cup."

The Wally comes with three milk pitchers (250 millilitres, 400 millilitres, and 700 millilitres), which are automatically recognised by the machine's infrared sensors. Once the filled milk pitcher is placed on the Wally's tilting platform and the recipe is selected, the tray tilts as it steams to replicate the movements of the barista.

Brydon believes the Wally is an essential tool for a variety of busy coffee environments.

"We've introduced Wallys in very diverse environments for very different solutions – from Bunnings cafés to CBD specialty coffee shops. In some settings, it's there as assistance to a small team doing multiple jobs, such as making coffee and heating food. Whereas in other settings, it helps reduce wait times in busy periods," he says.

"The first Australian café we trialled it in was Three Bags Full, just down the road from our showroom in Abbotsford. For them, it meant they could be more versatile and get through the morning rush more efficiently without having to pull another member off the café floor. It also meant they could save a bit on labour and send someone home a little earlier."

Since the technology was released in 2021, it's been widely celebrated by the Australian market – a café culture that embraces milk-based coffees like no other.

"The Wally was designed for the needs of a milk-centred coffee market like Australia. In a high-performance environment like ours, it's designed to make the life of a barista much easier," says Brydon.

## CONQUERING THE MORNING CRUSH

One of Wally's early adopters was Michael Borstrock, Owner of Lobby Espresso Group. His venue in the lobby of Westpac's head office in Sydney was one of the first cafés in the country to install a Wally on its bar.

With more than 6000 employees at Westpac and around 3,500 staff in the building each day, Lobby Espresso is set up for speed and efficiency. On busy days, the team of eight can serve up to 1000 coffees and get through about 10 kilograms of beans.

"We pride ourselves on consistency and speed, so our setup during busy periods is a very slick operation. If something isn't right, the wheels will come off," Michael says.

"The team at La Marzocco approached me just before the launch of the Wally to trial it in our store and I haven't looked back since we added it to our workflow. Now, I don't understand why anyone in the industry wouldn't have a Wally on their workbench."

Michael believes the Wally is one of the most cost-effective automatic milk steamers on the market. During the morning rush between 7am and 11am, Lobby Espresso will have one barista pulling shots, another steaming milk on the traditional machine and the Wally in unison, and a third pouring milk.

"Wally ticks all the boxes. In our busy periods, we'll just use it for regular and skimmed milk and use one size jug so it's just a continuous stream of perfectly steamed milk. You just push the button and it does what it needs to do – it never lets me down," he says.

"For me, one of the best selling points is that it's so simple to clean and you don't have to buy specific chemicals from La Marzocco. I'm not contracted or beholden to any company to purchase their products to satisfy a warranty. It's simply cleaned with water, as per a standard steam wand."

## EMBRACING AUTOMATION

Another company to embrace Wally is Axil Coffee Roasters in Melbourne. Founder David Makin says at first his team were reluctant to adopt the new technology, yet now the automatic milk steamer is an essential part of their workflow.

"Whenever you introduce a new piece of technology it's going to be a process for the team to adapt because most people don't like change," says David.

"We first introduced a Wally to our original café in Hawthorn. It took a bit of time to work out how the automatic steamer would fit into our workflow and which milks we'd use it for, but once it was fully ingrained in our system it became an essential tool."

> "A WALLY MILK COSTS A CAFÉ OWNER ABOUT $5 A DAY, WITH NO PAYROLL TAX OR SICK DAYS – FOR US, THAT'S A WIN-WIN SITUATION."

David says the rise of alternative milks over the past decade has had a considerable impact on the workflow of his venues. When the Hawthorn café first opened in 2011 it served three different types of milk – today if offers seven.

"In 2011 we offered full cream, skimmed, and soy milks, and back then around 60 per cent of our customers ordered full cream. Now, the percentage is spread evenly across all seven milks we have on the menu. It's put a lot of pressure on the baristas," he says.

"This is where introducing Wally has a been a great help as it adds an additional steam wand with pre-programmed recipes. We've since rolled it out at all our sites and introduced it to some of our wholesale accounts."

As well as juggling an increasing number of milks and alternatives over the past decade, the industry has also faced staff recruitment and retainment issues. David believes this is another area for which Wally has provided a solution.

"In the mornings, we often had the problem that we need three baristas on the bar to get through the rush until about 11, but after that we only required two. However, most staff don't want three- to four-hour shifts, they want a full day's work," he says.

"The Wally has enabled us to reduce the staff in the morning to two, which has also reduced our labour costs. It allows us to run a little leaner on staffing without compromising efficiency or consistency. A Wally costs a café owner about $5 a day, with no payroll tax or sick days – for us that's a win-win situation." ▮

For more information, visit au.lamarzocco.com

Wally in-situ at Westpac Lobby Espresso. Image: La Marzocco.

# MOSAIC

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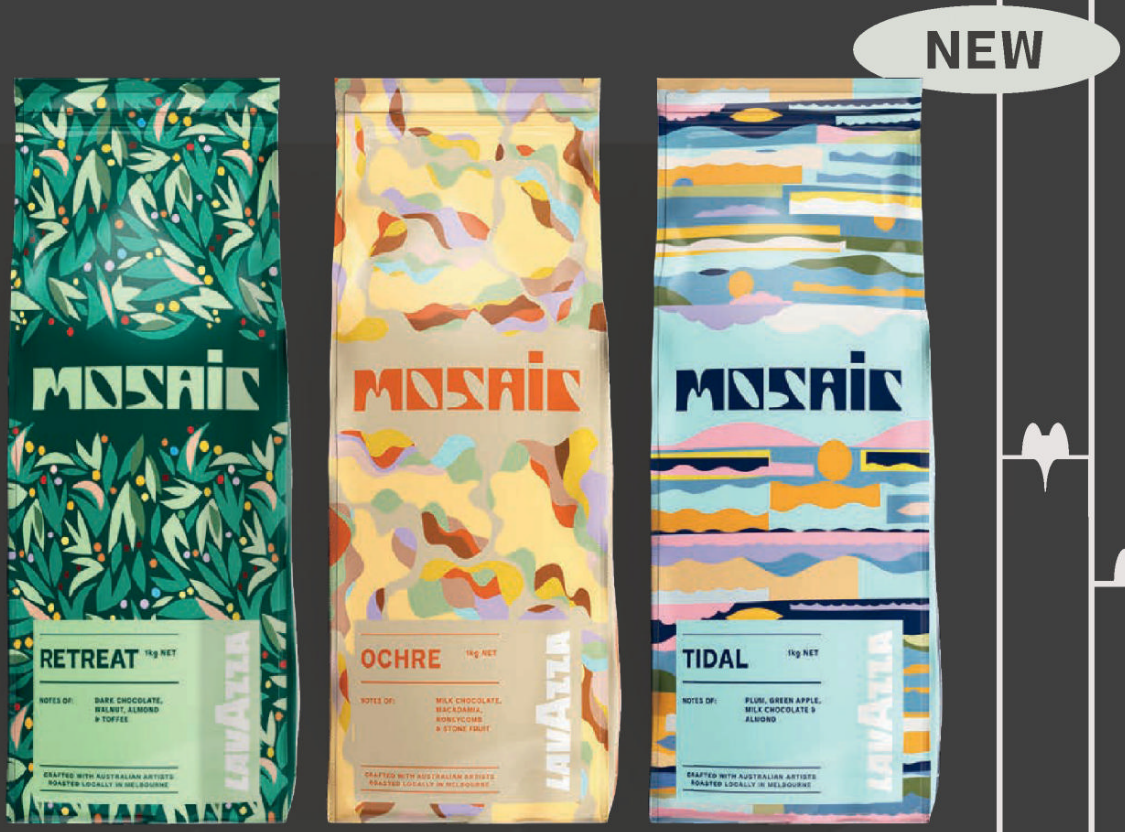
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NOTES OF: MILK CHOCOLATE, MACADAMIA, HONEYCOMB & STONE FRUIT
CRAFTED WITH AUSTRALIAN ARTISTS ROASTED LOCALLY IN MELBOURNE
LAVAZZA
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TIDAL 1kg NET
NOTES OF: PLUM, GREEN APPLE, MILK CHOCOLATE & ALMOND
CRAFTED WITH AUSTRALIAN ARTISTS ROASTED LOCALLY IN MELBOURNE
LAVAZZA

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HANNAH
EMMA

Images: CafeSmart.

CafeSmart returns from 2 to 8 August for its 15th campaign.

# Raising a cup of celebration and support

CafeSmart returns in August 2025 for its 15th campaign raising funds to support people experiencing homelessness in Australia.

Liz Bayrak wishes CafeSmart wasn't needed, that homelessness in Australia had become a thing of the past. Unfortunately, homelessness isn't going anywhere; in fact, it's growing.

Fifteen years ago, when the idea of mobilising the coffee industry to fight homelessness was just a spark in one man's head, there were estimated to be about 105,000 people experiencing homelessness around Australia.

Today, based on Census and other figures, that is expected to have grown by more than 22,000 people – about the population of Mount Isa in Queensland.

"Ideally, CafeSmart wouldn't need to exist," says Liz, the organisation's Campaign and Events Coordinator. "But it's amazing that it does and the impact it's had."

Like the problem it tackles, CafeSmart was a lot smaller when it began in 2011. Back then, Founder Adam Robinson, inspired by the success of StreetSmart's restaurant-oriented campaign DineSmart, saw an opportunity to bring the coffee community into the movement.

"Adam approached a few coffee roasters with the idea and they were pretty keen straight away," says Liz.

"Coffee culture is so ingrained in everyday life in Australia, so Adam asked the question: why not turn that everyday ritual into an opportunity to give back to your local community?"

The response was immediate. That first campaign was initially focused on the café scenes in Melbourne and Sydney, pulling in the support of about 100 businesses. Powered by good coffee and good will, the campaign has grown to become a national movement involving more than 800 cafés, with plans to hit 1000 in 2025.

"It's largely grown through word of mouth. We don't have big budgets, instead we've really relied on the industry to tell their peers. Now, we can barely keep up with the number of cafés that sign up each day in the lead up to the event," says Liz.

In 2025, hundreds of cafés will be involved in a week-long campaign between 2 and 8 August. Throughout the week, cafés will help raise awareness of homelessness in their communities with posters and stickers, before rallying for the main event on Friday 8 August when they'll donate $1 from every coffee sold.

"We also encourage cafés to invite their customers to chip in and donate too," she says. "Many of our roasters generously subsidise the cost of beans for the day to show their appreciation for the cafés stepping up."

Roasters play a crucial role in inspiring their networks to participate.

"We'll send roasters flyers and lots of digital assets to help spread the word with their wholesale networks," she says.

"It's free for roasters to get involved and a great way to strengthen connections with their café partners while supporting an important cause."

Registrations are now open and Liz says the CafeSmart team are determined to make this milestone 15th year the biggest and most impactful yet. Helping to make that happen is the continued support of principal sponsors Vitasoy and La Marzocco, alongside supporting sponsor CoffeeTools – long-standing partners that, alongside many others, have helped build CafeSmart into the force it is today.

CafeSmart's Liz Bayrak (centre) with Australian Barista Champions Anthony Douglas (left) and Jack Simpson (right).

But that growth is a doubled-edged sword. The grassroots campaign has become a powerful national initiative, but the darker reality is that this has been in large out of necessity because the need of homelessness has also grown.

Liz says that acknowledging the growth and support as well as honouring the 15-year milestone will be a key part of this year's proceedings.

"There's a very serious message behind CafeSmart, but there's a lot of fun surrounding it," she says.

"We want to celebrate with everyone who has helped us come this far. We have so many businesses that have been on board since day dot and lots more that have joined us along the way."

This year, the organisation is planning a gala – its first evening event. It will take place in Melbourne, where the movement started and the campaign is supported by a "massive" community. The event will also be a major fundraising opportunity, Liz says, because more donations are needed to help the growing number of people facing homelessness.

CafeSmart organisers have an ambitious 2025 target, hoping to raise $300,000 across Australia. That money will go towards important projects, organisations, and causes focused on helping those impacted by homelessness.

"Because homelessness is complex, we're very flexible with our approach," says Liz.

"We fund projects covering all sorts of different things, like domestic and family violence services, because we know the lack of affordable housing and domestic violence are some of the leading causes of homelessness. While people are waiting for housing, they may need help with food and material aid, so a tent or a swag to cover their heads for the night, and clothing.

"There are even social connection programs, because being homeless is very isolating. We'll fund community groups where people who are experiencing homelessness can get together and chat and have non-judgmental conversation and a cup of tea or coffee."

Those organisations are invited to apply for the funding from CafeSmart, with an approach that responds to local needs.

"In some states, there might be higher rates of food insecurity, elsewhere it could be flood recovery efforts," Liz says.

"We're very responsive. We see what's happening and invite applications from those organisations that might be struggling because they don't have any government funding and rely on this sort of community support."

CafeSmart will also be leaning on its own community for support.

"We have so many brands who have been on board since day one," says Liz.

Beyond the main sponsors, others to lend a hand throughout the years include roasters Single O, Five Senses, ST. ALi, Campos, ONA, Padre, and Locale – among many others.

CafeSmart will need all their help and more in its 2025 campaign to support the many thousands of people in Australia experiencing homelessness.

"Homelessness is worsening beyond pre-pandemic levels," says Liz. "We'd really like to hit $300,000 this year. That would enable us to support about 11,500 people facing homelessness through various projects."

Ideally, CafeSmart wouldn't be needed anymore. However, we can all raise a cup of coffee to celebrate its existence, the achievement of its incredible milestone, and the power of community support in tackling homelessness. ◘

For more information, visit streetsmartaustralia.org/cafesmart

Organisers aim to raise $300,000 to fund important projects, organisations, and causes focused on helping those impacted by homelessness.

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# A golden opportunity

## Australia's longest-running culinary competition is celebrating its milestone 60th anniversary this year, and local roaster Buondi is back on board as a sponsor.

For six decades, the Nestlé Golden Chef's Hat Award has helped nurture the careers of chefs across Australia and New Zealand, spurring them to greater heights.

The competition has positively impacted more than 8,000 successful foodservice professionals and chefs from both countries. Many winners and competitors have gone on to become globally celebrated chefs and industry leaders across a variety of roles.

Karlie Durrant, Communications and Sustainability Manager at Nestlé Professional, says the competition was created to provide a platform for young chefs to elevate their culinary skills and receive valuable mentoring and networking opportunities.

"Our award aims to nurture talent and build confidence in young chefs, highlighting their contributions to the culinary industry," she says. "We are committed to growing this talent, building a successful foodservice industry, and advocating for an enduring and inclusive foodservice sector."

Nestlé's commitment extends to equipping the chefs with the essential skills and opportunities for success, which can not only help to enhance their economic circumstances but also cultivate a robust talent pipeline within the industry, Karlie adds.

Recognising that young people are the entrepreneurs and innovators of tomorrow, the competition focuses on chefs aged 16 to 24. In 2020, it expanded to New Zealand, underscoring the company's commitment to the regional culinary community.

The award is sponsored by Nestlé's Buondi coffee range, which in 2025 celebrates 10 years in the Australian market.

"We invite apprentice and junior chefs from Australia and New Zealand to participate," Karlie says. "Over June and July, we host 12 regional finals, where more than 150 chefs compete in metro and regional heats, vying for a coveted spot among the final 12 competitors."

During regional heats, participants are challenged to develop and execute their unique recipe for a main course and dessert, while the grand final requires them to also present an entrée.

The judges look for talent, creativity, technical skill, and sustainable practices in culinary preparation. Awards are given for categories such as most sustainable practice, most creative use of Nestlé products, and best dessert. This year, the best signature dish award will be introduced to celebrate the diverse culinary backgrounds and personal styles of participants.

The competition also focuses on the chefs' capacities to demonstrate professionalism and innovation, and the ability to engage with the culinary community. Additionally, the judges emphasise the importance of teamwork and communication.

"This holistic approach is reflected in the Buondi All Rounder Award, which recognises the chef who excels in these areas and makes a positive contribution to the team's performance and dynamics," Karlie says.

"The competition is all about celebrating professional chefs and trying to elevate them within the industry, focusing on their skill development. Participants receive mentorship from industry judges during the experience.

"Our focus is on empowering the next generation of talent. As an industry-leading organisation, we have a role to play to ensure we've got a long-term sustainable industry that's thriving. It's also a great way to offer

Images: Nestlé.

Australian coffee roaster Buondi is a sponsor of the Nestlé Golden Chef's Hat Award.

young people another pathway and give them an experience outside the kitchen, because it's a much bigger world when they can interact with other chefs and see what's possible."

When the competition launched in 1965 it was called the Nestlé Silver Chef's Hat Award and there were no age limits. In 1972, it was re-imagined as a competition dedicated to youth and upgraded to gold.

The grand final was previously held in culinary institutes such as TAFEs and the William Angliss Institute until 2015 when it relocated to Fine Food Australia, where the grand final will again be held in September 2025.

"The 12 regional finalists will compete in a head-to-head grand final cook-off in front of a live audience, which gives another level of challenge for the chefs," she says.

So, how does coffee come into the competition and what role does Buondi play as a sponsor?

Marcin Poloczek, Brand Manager at Nestlé, says the partnership represents a complementary collaboration between Buondi – a brand synonymous with locally roasted, quality coffee – and the culinary excellence showcased in the competition.

"Buondi caters to Australian coffee lovers and has a presence in foodservice establishments across the country," he says. "These venues, including hotels, clubs, and restaurants, are home to young chefs.

"The Golden Chef competition not only highlights the skills of talented chefs but aligns perfectly with Buondi's commitment to enhancing culinary experiences through exceptional coffee."

Coffee is also one ingredient offered to the chefs to include in their creations.

"As part of the Best Buondi Coffee Creation award, coffee was a mandatory ingredient in last year's regional and metro cook-offs, lending itself to being used in creative ways for sweet and savoury dishes," says Marcin.

"This also translated to the grand final, where despite not being a mandatory ingredient, Buondi coffee beans were used by seven of 11 grand finalists."

Food and coffee go hand in hand and while the most obvious link is that Buondi appears in many venues where some of the chefs work, on a more abstract level, Marcin says it's about elevating coffee moments, elevating the venue, and helping foodservice operators elevate their offer overall.

Nestlé recently refreshed the Buondi brand to encapsulate the Australian way of life, positioning it to enhance moments and how people connect – beyond the coffee – to socialise or take a moment to relax.

"Buondi blends are crafted to enrich and elevate everyday coffee moments," Marcin says. "The range includes three blends, each formulated to suit and elevate a different moment for coffee drinkers. Smooth or spicy, dark or mild, we have something to help people hit pause during their day and take a moment for themselves."

In last year's grand final, Buondi coffee beans were used by seven of 11 finalists.

Designed to give an extra boost to the day, Buondi's Dark Spark blend is an intense dark roast with a rich aroma of brown sugar and maple syrup that pairs well with any type of milk.

Steady State is an ideal blend for any time of day that has a delicate, nutty aroma with creamy chocolate notes, and can be enjoyed as a standalone black coffee or with milk. Complex Soul invites the customer to unwind and take a break before tackling the rest of the day and has a subtle nutty flavour, complemented by a malt-like aroma. Paired with milk, it delivers a smooth toffee finish.

Last year, the coffee brand hosted a chef's lounge at Fine Food Australia, located next to the competition arena of the Nestlé Golden Chef's Hat Award, which will return for 2025 and serve its full range of blends.

"It's a chance for chefs, not just those competing but those who are mentors, judges, and in the industry, to take a moment and have a mindful moment with Buondi," says Marcin.

Nestlé also supports initiatives that promote inclusivity and innovation through its partnerships with The Burnt Chef Project and the National Indigenous Culinary Institute (NICI). The former raises awareness and provides support and education around mental health issues in hospitality worldwide, while NICI nurtures skilled Indigenous chefs by providing elite training and experiences with Australia's top chefs.

These initiatives, along with the Nestlé Golden Chef's Hat Award, are part of the broader global program Nestlé Needs YOUth, aimed at providing economic opportunities for individuals aged 16 to 30.

"We achieved our global goal of helping 10 million young people access these opportunities by 2024, six years ahead of our target; the chefs who are part of the Golden Chef competition across Australia and New Zealand are part of this success story," says Karlie.

The national winner of the Nestlé Golden Chef of the Year will be crowned at an industry awards dinner and will receive an all-expenses-paid culinary journey including a stage placement in Singapore or Thailand. The prize is part of a total prize pool of $38,000. ◘

For more information, visit nestleprofessional.com.au or goldenchefs.com.au

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In 2024, Buondi hosted a chef's lounge at Fine Food Australia.

# Time for a Cheeky latte?

## Minor Figures is shaking up the alt-milk market with a unique new flavour of its Australian-made oat milk.

Minor Figures is a brand that's always gone against the grain. With its idiosyncratic branding and tongue-in-cheek social presence, it's carved out a niche in what is a very crowded alt-milk market. And now it's taking its individualism a step further by introducing a new, never-seen-before flavour to its Aussie collection.

Cheeky Oat is designed to deliver the cinnamon sweetness and choux pastry luxe of Spain's favourite dessert export: churros.

"We like to turn up in a unique and fun way. Just bringing out a standard flavoured milk isn't very 'Minor Figures'," says Henry Catts, Minor Figures General Manager APAC.

"Therefore, if we were going to do a flavoured milk it meant breaking away from the standard profile of chocolate, strawberry, or vanilla."

With Barista Oat, Everyday Oat, and Organic Oat products in its range, the team at Minor Figures wanted to continue its growth in the Australian market and remain relevant with a new product that would appeal to the adventurous tastes of Millennials and Gen Z.

With the rise of signature drinks and customisable iced coffees, Henry and team knew flavour was going to be the driver of their new creation. For inspiration, they looked to the innovative coffee shops and cafés that would be using the product.

"We like to do things a little out of the box. We started exploring our link to coffee and the café scene and threw around ideas until we found one that stuck," Henry says.

"Every product you bring out must be able to work on its own, but Churros ticked all the boxes because it's also a great partner to coffee. The flavours of toasty cinnamon and crisp pastry encapsulate those indulgent notes many consumers are looking for."

Cheeky Oat Churros has been developed to pair with a wide variety of coffees, from intense dark-roast blends to lighter single origins. Once intertwined, the coffee and churros oat milk deliver a deliciously simple riff on a dirty chai or a cinnamon caramel latte depending on the coffee blend.

"We have a big range of coffees in the office so we can continuously trial our milks with them. The beauty of this new flavour is that it works well with all of them. From the lightest to the darkest roasts, the cinnamon flavour still cuts through," he says.

"When you add Cheeky Oat to coffee, it brings out the caramel sweetness of the beans. The barista can have a bit of fun matching the oat milk with different blends to coax out different flavour notes."

The Minor Figures team recommend serving Cheeky Oat Churros as an iced latte, but there's a huge range of signature drink creations just waiting to be masterminded by inventive baristas. According to Henry, one of the benefits of the flavoured milk is that café owners don't have to buy additional syrups to create a churros latte.

"The trend among Gen Z and Millennials for creative drinks is unrelenting and there's a hunger for newness. We wanted to introduce a product that not only gave our wholesale partners a simple option to concoct new drinks but also offered value," he says.

"What's more, we wanted to create a product that was easy to work with. Not all oat milks are straightforward to texture, but Cheeky Oat steams well and will deliver a silky result just like our other oat milks."

While the Minor Figures team can't get enough of Cheeky Churros as an iced coffee, they say it tastes just as good as a warm cinnamon-spiced latte – just the kind of cosy drink Australians crave when the temperature drops and winter takes hold.

"Every time I go into the office someone's drinking it as an iced latte. Soon we're going to have to introduce some sort of limit otherwise we're going to run ourselves out of stock," he says. "We're working on some exciting collaborations too. Keep an eye on our social feeds as we start to show up where you least expect it."

The new flavour was launched in Woolworths stores across Australia in May 2025 and is available now for Minor Figures wholesale partners. Henry says the

MINOR FIGURES
CHEEKY OAT
(CHURROS)
FUTURE LIQUIDS LABORATORY
Oat Milk · 1 Litre ℮
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The team at Minor Figures like to do things a little differently, and that includes the brand's first flavoured oat milk. Images: Minor Figures.

feedback from café partners so far has been overwhelmingly positive and that interested parties can get in touch to sample Cheeky Oat at their venue.

"Everyone is very intrigued by it and then they taste it and they're like 'hang on, this is different'. As soon as you crack open the seal, the smell of cinnamon hits you and you can't help but be drawn in," says Henry.

"There are a lot of products that smell great but don't deliver the flavour – what's great about Cheeky Oat Churros is that it doesn't disappoint. The way it's been formulated means it really holds its flavour."

This focus on delivering exceptional products has been part of the major changes that have taken place at Minor Figures Australia over the past year. After being taken over by family-owned Slades Beverages in Victoria, the company has localised its production.

"We have always used Australian oats, but now they're processed here in Australia too. Our oat base is processed just 15 minutes from our production facility in Ballarat and we source most of our oats from regional Victoria too," says Henry.

"We're really proud to be producing our product in a sustainable way and keeping local business alive."

All of Minor Figures' products are made with at least 97 per cent Australian ingredients, including the new churros flavour. What's more, Cheeky Oat has less sugar than most of the other flavoured alternative milks in the market.

"In the plant-based space, the average chocolate milk has around seven grams of sugar per serve and vanilla is around six, whereas Cheeky Oat only has five," he says.

"As it stacks up, it's actually quite low compared to other options, but it's surprising as when tasting it you're blown away by the flavour."

While Minor Figures has plenty of competition from other alt-milk brands, Henry is confident it has a unique offering for café owners across Australia.

"We're not one of the big guys: we're an independent business, like a lot of the cafés and roasters we partner with. We love our local communities and we love coffee. We want to support businesses and see them thrive," he says.

"Our products let the coffee shine, we are the Minor Figure in the cup. This allows our customers to express who they are, rather than tasting like every other café. Now they can take being unique a step further, with a Cheeky Oat."

For more information, visit au.minorfigures.com

MINOR FIGURES
CHEEKY OAT
(CHURROS)

Cheeky Oat has been developed to pair with a wide variety of coffees.

# The people's champion

MICE2025 shattered attendance records earlier this year, with Zest Specialty Coffee Roasters taking home the coveted, public-voted title of Australia's Favourite Coffee.

Images: Prime Creative Media.

Team Zest with their Australia's Favourite Coffee award.

There are many roasters that claim to be the best, but there are only two that have received the official title of Australia's Favourite Coffee since the annual award was established at Melbourne International Coffee Expo (MICE) in 2024. And this year, with more than 30,000 coffee enthusiasts and professionals in attendance over the three-day event, the public-voted accolade went to the city's own Zest Specialty Coffee Roasters.

The Zest team saw off competition from more than 40 other roasters taking part in MICE2025. Attendees were invited to live the life of a coffee judge for the day, tasting the coffees on offer and voting for their favourite via QR codes.

> "WINNING AUSTRALIA'S FAVOURITE COFFEE IS A POWERFUL VALIDATION OF THE ZEST WAY."

"Winning Australia's Favourite Coffee at MICE is a huge honour for our team at Zest. But more than that, it's a powerful validation of the Zest Way – our belief that exceptional coffee, delivered with genuine hospitality, creates real buzz, loyalty, and joy," says Rod Greenfield, Zest Specialty Coffee Roasters CEO.

"We're not just in the business of roasting coffee. We're in the business of helping cafés thrive. When a visitor tells us that our team 'created a feeling, an energy, a belief' or that we made them 'feel at home' as a literal outsider, we know we're doing something right. That energy flows through every cup and, ultimately, flows down to the café's bottom line."

The 2025 event marked the roaster's 11th year exhibiting at MICE, with the team pulling out all the stops to create one of the most engaging stands on the show floor. The 360-degree bar offered four different experiences, including an espresso bar serving the roaster's four core blends, a brew bar showcasing exceptional single origins, a signature drinks station dishing out crowd-pleasers all day, and the Game of Tongues arena where attendees were challenged to identify the Robusta from four coffee samples.

Zest's engaging lineup paid off, with snaking lines of eager attendees queuing to take part in the activations and coffee fans voting for the roaster in their hundreds.

"This award, voted by the public, is especially meaningful because it tells us our flavour, values, and culture are resonating. It reminds us that hospitality still matters, that flavour sells the second cup, and that the Zest Way makes a difference – on both sides of the counter," says Rod.

"We're humbled, we're grateful, and we're more energised than ever to keep sharing Zest with the world."

Over the three days, the Zest team served more than 5000 signature drinks – with the Zest Blanc, a velvety white coffee creation, being the most popular – poured more than 4000 coffees, and prepared more than 600 pourovers. Rod says the team wanted their stand to be both fun and educational, while also highlighting Zest's 360-degree approach to café partnerships.

"Our core pillar at Zest has always been an emphasis on flavour, but it also extends to helping cafés thrive, which we do by supporting our partners and providing exceptional flavour," he says.

"Cafés are doing it tough at the moment. We've talked to many coffee shop owners in the industry to find out what their biggest pain points are so we can work out how to best help them as their roaster. Our 360-support includes assisting with social media and marketing plans, providing reliable support in terms of equipment upkeep and maintenance, and ensuring deliveries are on time. We aim to ease their pain to fuel their gain."

In challenging times communities come together, with MICE serving as a platform for people in the coffee industry to share knowledge, ideas, and support.

"MICE is an annual opportunity for the coffee industry to come together under one roof. Of course, our main aim of exhibiting is to connect with new café partners, but it's also fantastic to be able to see the joy on consumers' faces as they try our coffees," says Rod.

"MICE is a community hub for Australia's coffee sector. We're very proud to be named Australia's Favourite Coffee – it boosts our confidence that we're doing the right thing and continuing to improve our offering and support our café partners."

Roasters interested in being in with a chance to scoop the title in 2026 can sign up at internationalcoffeeexpo.com

Zest's 360-degree bar had four stations and attracted long queues of coffee-curious attendees.

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La Pavoni and MC Cyclery have collaborated to create a clubhouse for Sydney's cyclists. Image: La Pavoni.

# Coffee, community, and cranks

## Coffee and cycling are two passionate pursuits that are often inseparable. But why are the seemingly unrelated hobbies so firmly entrenched in each other's cultures?

When the layman thinks about cycling, one of their first thoughts will inevitably land on the image of Lycra-clad riders sipping a coffee in a café at the end of a long ride.

For many in the cycling community, coffee is almost as important a part of the ride as the bike itself.

Cycling's coffee obsession can be traced through the years of European Grand Tours – the Tour de France, the Giro d'Italia, and the Vuelta a España. From all-time great cyclist Eddy Merckx's sponsorship with Faema in the 1960s through to the current crop of elite cyclists, the sport's enthusiasm for coffee is an itch that will never quite be scratched.

That love of coffee permeates through all levels of the cycling community. From the professional through to the weekend warrior, the pull of a good coffee is one of the sport's great equalisers.

The best evidence of this merging of passions can, perhaps, be found at MC Cyclery's new clubhouse, located a stone's throw from Centennial Park or "cycling central" in Kensington, Sydney.

A bike shop by trade, MC Cyclery's partnership with La Pavoni has seen the Kensington cycling destination and retail store flourish into one of Australia's best advertisements for the successful marriage of coffee and cycling, and the community it creates.

On its ground floor is a typical yet well-equipped bike shop, but its mezzanine features a sprawling lounge and walls of cycling memorabilia, which customers and members can enjoy alongside specialty coffee brewed on site.

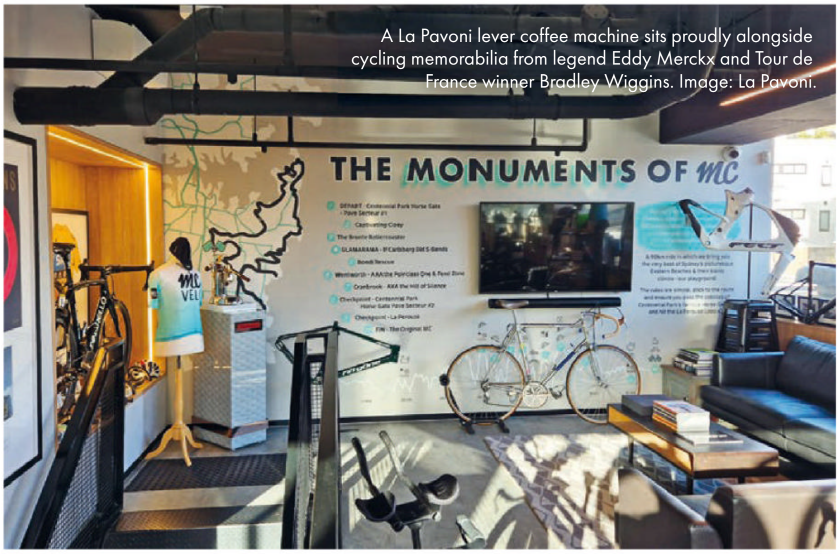
It has become a place for the local cycling community to not just buy a bike or have one serviced, but a meeting place for before and after rides where people gather to discuss these intertwined passions.

Co-Owner of MC Cyclery Harvey Crabtree has experienced some of the best cycling environments across the globe. He tells *BeanScene* the team at MC Cyclery have taken inspiration from some of these iconic locations.

"The other Co-Owner of MC Cyclery, Andy, and I are very lucky and privileged to have ridden bikes all around the world, and

CYCLERY
Mobil

The promise of a quality coffee after a long ride is a pillar of the MC Cyclery community. Image: MC Cyclery.



A La Pavoni lever coffee machine sits proudly alongside cycling memorabilia from legend Eddy Merckx and Tour de France winner Bradley Wiggins. Image: La Pavoni.

we've taken a little bit from everywhere," says Harvey. "Places like The Service Course in Girona, or Rapha clubhouses in London, Mallorca, Singapore, and New York.

"The best ones are where people have really been able to successfully combine hospitality with bike retail and add a service course element.

"The best Rapha clubhouses in the world are the ones that are managed by ex-hospitality professionals, not necessarily bike trade professionals, where we treat the customers as the 'guest'.

"MC Cyclery's still a fully functional bike shop where you can come to buy a tube and be in and out in five seconds, or you can sit upstairs and work with a coffee in the lounge area using our Wi-Fi, watching race replays while we service your bike downstairs."

Sites like Harvey's have found success not only through providing the extra early morning pep needed to undertake long rides from as early as 5am, but also through generating a close-knit community that shares an appreciation of coffee.

The early morning exercise regime is rapidly gaining popularity around metropolitan Sydney through the introduction of run clubs and group fitness classes like F45 and BFT, but it's a time of morning cyclists have been making their own for decades.

Harvey is no different, but his morning routine has somewhat shifted due to the popularity of his shop as a meeting place for the local contingent of club members.

"I would always be the first in the store at about 5am to prep the machine and make sure everything was set right for the ride return, then I'd head off to wherever the morning ride was meeting, and we'd come back to the clubhouse," he says.

La Pavoni has laid the foundation for quality coffee at MC Cyclery. Image: La Pavoni.

"Now, people have got used to the fact I'm there at that time, so instead of having a beautiful, quiet double espresso by myself, there will be people tapping on the glass and coming in for a coffee."

The strength of MC Cyclery's coffee- and cycle-loving community is no more apparent than in the immediate aftermath of a Saturday morning ride.

"What we'll see after the ride on a Saturday morning is 40 to 60 wheels parked in the loading dock and 30 people upstairs watching races, having a chat, and enjoying themselves. Most of them will stay for two or even three coffees.

"People want to hang around and spend more time here. It creates a far more social environment than the alternative of finishing at someone else's coffee shop and sitting on milk crates, where eventually everyone just gets onto their bikes and scatters to the four winds."

Head of La Pavoni Australia Leon Wolf often frequents the MC Cyclery clubhouse, so much so he usually finds himself pulling coffees there after a ride.

As a keen cyclist with his finger on the pulse of the coffee world, he is fully aware of why the two passions are so closely linked by those who enjoy them.

"People in the cycling community really value craftsmanship, and it's the same with coffee," Leon says.

"You can buy a coffee machine or a mould-made road bike off the shelf, and it will make a coffee or ride like a bike, but there's an added connection piece with the appreciation of a handmade product, and the care and investment that has been placed in it by the technician or manufacturer.

"That connection extends to La Pavoni and the MC Cyclery clubhouse. The road bikes they sell are artisan, bespoke geometry, handmade, and super authentic, from the luxe brands including Passoni and Parlee, while La Pavoni products have also been handmade since 1905 in a factory that is still standing in Milan."

MC Cyclery's transition from bike shop to meeting place is far from unique, but it's one that has been achieved with incredible finesse.

Harvey admits profit from coffee is the furthest thing from the business' mind on any given day, and Leon believes more bike shops should look to follow the example set by MC Cyclery.

"I think the more cycling shops that can turn into clubhouses and create communities, the better for the culture and the sport," Leon says.

"You can have an experience where you ride your bike with tunnel vision, get home, and are exhausted, or you can have an experience where you've had a cup of coffee, met with friends, had a great ride, socialised, and had a rest at the clubhouse."

There is, however, one thing MC Cyclery will not do when serving its coffee.

"We have a very small menu, and on the bottom it says, 'no chocolate, we are a bike shop," says Harvey. "A couple of the ladies got a bit militant about that, so I had to bend a little bit, but they're the only two who are allowed it. Their names are even on the shaker."

He says that desire to marry the quality of La Pavoni equipment with high-quality beans has created an unmissable experience for the local cycling community,

"We knew from the start we needed to have our equipment and our beans on the same level and not take shortcuts. We've had ST. ALi on the beans since day one with its Italo Disco blend," he says.

"We have people who never deviate from the long black, cortado, or short double mac, right the way through to people who can literally consume pints of cappuccino.

"We're celebrating what we've got and using it socially as much as commercially, and that's the missing link.

"This is what happens when you let people who love bicycles and hospitality build a bike store." ◘

For more information, visit au.lapavoni.com

Emma McDougall is the Communications and Administration Coordinator of the NZSCA.

# Robots vs. humans

## Cafés staffed by robots are popping up across the world – including New Zealand. But are these android baristas as good as the real deal?

Barista Wayne Burrows took on a robot barista to see who would craft the best coffee. Image: Wayne Burrows.

ease do not touch the glass
will slide down automatically
Please do not touch the glass
Door will slide down automatically
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The NZSCA was approached by the 8 til Late program from Radio NZ to find out who could make the best coffee between a robot and a barista. With three robot cafés opening in quick succession from November 2024 in the Auckland CBD, the radio team's interest was piqued.

We volunteered Wayne Burrows, Board Member and Competition Barista, to find out if he could take on a robotic arm and craft a better coffee.

"Robotics is important for our industry, especially if it can help me make better coffee and to maximise the taste from that coffee, then that's hugely beneficial," says Wayne.

Cost effective, efficient, or gimmick? Overseas in big cities such as Seoul and Shanghai, robot cafés are widespread. In Auckland, however, they are a tiny part of the market, placed in busy places such as universities and high foot-traffic areas, mainly aimed at young professionals.

While robots add fun and innovation to coffee making, the team were surprised to find they work alongside the barista. The owners of the robot arms see them as a complement not competition to the barista. They can save on labour but only baristas can bring the warmth, creativity, and personality.

"The goal of the barista is to calibrate the coffee to get a delicious solution. But I do love the robots," says Wayne.

However, who was going to win the taste test? Wayne cleaned, calibrated, and dialled in the radio office coffee machine so the radio team could understand how to make a good coffee and therefore judge the robot's offering. They called him an "alchemist of caffeine". We agree.

Flat whites were "unavailable" from the robot, so that proved a stumbling block. The team persisted and assessed temperature, texture, and how the coffee shone through the milk. They recommended stirring the coffee produced by the robot. The robot's milk was aerated more, and the coffee was more bitter. The good news is that the integration of robots in cafés doesn't signal the end for human baristas.

Many industry experts believe while machines handle repetitive tasks efficiently, the human touch remains irreplaceable, especially in creating a welcoming atmosphere and building customer relationships. As technology continues to advance, the coffee industry in New Zealand will find a balance between innovation and tradition, ensuring that while robots may brew the coffee, the heart of the café experience remains human. We'd like to thank a special human, Wayne Burrows, for taking on the robot and remaining distinctly un-robotic.

You can listen to Wayne's interview at rnz.co.nz

*For more information on the New Zealand Specialty Coffee Association, or to join, visit nzsca.org*

# MINOR FIGURES CHEEKY OAT (CHURROS)

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Melbourne's Mercato Centrale is the first marketplace of its type outside of Italy.

# Melbourne meets Milan

In the heart of Melbourne, Mercato Centrale is redefining urban dining, partnering with Lavazza to blend artisan traditions and culinary innovation with community spirit.

Mercato Centrale is more than a market: it's a celebration of Italian culture, cuisine, and community.

Home to 23 artisan vendors, at Mercato Centrale customers can buy warm-from-the-oven bread, shop for fresh produce, sit down for lunch or a formal dinner, or grab a shot of caffeine at any time of day or night.

When Managing Director Gary Patikkis and team embarked on bringing the iconic concept to Australia, Melbourne was their singular vision.

"We chose Melbourne because it's the hospitality capital of Australia," Gary says. "We thought, if there's an opportunity to really expose and highlight Mercato Centrale, the vehicle to do that would be our first step in Melbourne."

But the journey to establish the Italian marketplace on the other side of the world was far from simple.

"It took us eight years to get Mercato Centrale to come to Australia, the first site outside of Italy," he says, noting its existing locations in Florence, Milan, Rome, and Torino.

This wasn't just a business expansion but a passionate mission to transpose authentic Italian market culture. The search for the perfect location was meticulous, driven by a commitment to historical significance.

The McPherson's building – a four-storey Art Deco structure in the heart of the city on Collins Street – emerged as the ideal venue, embodying the Italian tradition of positioning markets in structures with deep cultural value. The building's industrial heritage became a canvas for their vision.

"The McPherson family used to manufacture nuts, bolts, and rivets, and supplied the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge," says Gary.

"We designed the space with an Art Deco feel, with steel floors and rustic pillars, creating an industrial feel for a market theme concept."

The historical connection runs deep – original building owners still visit, bringing memorabilia and sharing stories.

"We spent a lot of time with the Italians [at Mercato's Italian locations] and were really blown away by the way they bring food, culture, and people together under one roof," Gary says.

This philosophy became the cornerstone of Mercato Centrale's approach. The eight-year journey wasn't about speed but precision.

"We could have launched earlier very easily, but to get all the right artisans and every little detail right mattered," he says.

They were determined, he says, to

Visitors can choose from two of Lavazza's Mosaic blends.

Images: Mercato Centrale.

get every element right before launching the concept.

The result is more than a marketplace. It's a carefully curated space that celebrates Italian culture, community, and culinary excellence – a testament to patience, passion, and a vision of bringing authentic experiences to Melbourne's vibrant hospitality landscape.

## PROGRESSIVE PARTNERSHIPS

The partnership between Mercato Centrale and Lavazza emerged from a meticulous selection process rooted in shared values and a commitment to excellence.

"We spent a lot of time trying to understand suppliers and artisans," Gary says. "We're careful who we partner with. It's not about just getting the supply right – it's about the holistic view of the project."

Lavazza's new coffee range Mosaic, developed by artisans and roasted in Australia specifically for the local palate, proved to be the ideal choice.

"We decided to go with the Mosaic blends, because they are created by artisans and that's perfectly aligned with the spirit of what we do here," he says.

They selected two blends – Ochre, for milk-based coffees, and Tidal, for espresso – carefully chosen to suit Australian coffee preferences.

"We noticed the Ochre blend was a lot sweeter than traditional blends," Gary says. "We blind tasted it and had a whole series of our team members try it. It was so easy to drink, it was an easy decision for us."

This attention to detail reflects the depth of their collaborative approach. In fact, the partnership with Lavazza has transcended a typical supplier relationship.

"Lavazza spent a lot of time trying to understand the needs of customers in Australia," Gary says, highlighting Lavazza's commitment to understanding the local market's unique coffee culture.

This included recognising the difference between European espresso and Australian latte preferences. He says the collaboration was intensely hands-on and supportive.

"For the first three months, they would be swinging by, looking at the shop through the eyes of the customer," he says. "If that's not the definition of a partnership, I don't know what is."

Lavazza's involvement extended to educational initiatives, including Mercato Centrale's masterclasses and coffee workshops, which represent a cornerstone of its community engagement strategy.

"We have 23 artisans in the market and therefore we host 23 free masterclasses every month of the year," he says. "Customers can book into a class to learn how to make gnocchi, pizza, or explore coffee preparation techniques."

Mercato Centrale hosts 23 free masterclasses each month, including a coffee workshop.

The classes are deliberately diverse and interactive.

"We mix it up a bit," Gary says. "We create opportunities for customers to make great coffee at home, with equipment they'll have on hand like a cafetiere."

The approach goes beyond simple instruction, integrating multiple artisan skills.

"We partner with other artisans like our flair bartenders, who might demonstrate coffee-based martinis, or our cannoli station, teaching customers how to pair the right product with coffee," he says. "We want to give customers the tools to go away and make great quality coffee."

The classes serve multiple purposes, becoming more than just cooking lessons.

"Businesses use them as bonding exercises with their colleagues," he says. "And it's a great way for customers to understand why and how we do things."

Ultimately, these masterclasses embody Mercato Centrale's collaborative spirit.

"Every artisan knows their product intimately and passionately, so customers experience the product the way it's meant to be consumed – authentically," Gary says.

"We work very closely with Lavazza on these classes, and Nick Ferrara and Peter Dorkota [Lavazza National Training Managers] get involved as well,".

Ultimately, Gary sees the relationship with Lavazza as emblematic of a progressive business approach.

"Partnerships like this are the way of the future," he says. "Companies like Lavazza that have been around for many years really add value to any customer because they educate."

The collaboration represents more than a commercial arrangement – it's a shared commitment to culinary excellence, community, and authentic experience.

## FUTURE THINKING

Having invested eight years to establish the business in Melbourne, it shouldn't come as a surprise to learn that sustainability is a core principle at Mercato Centrale, with Gary emphasising that environmental initiatives don't compromise quality or increase costs.

"We're constantly looking at ways to improve how we do things and show the hospitality sector you can operate in a sustainable way without jeopardising quality or price," he says.

The marketplace's Compost Connect program exemplifies this commitment.

"Every artisan boutique has a compost bin in which unused ingredients are collected, picked up, and transferred to a station where they're used to plant trees and create manure," Gary says.

Technological innovation also supports the team's sustainability goals.

"We have a mobile induction kitchen, which was installed in collaboration with Electrolux. It's first of its kind, completely powered by a lithium battery," he says. "You plug it in, charge it, and it gives you eight hours of battery life."

Community engagement goes hand-in-hand with their sustainability efforts.

"We engage a lot with the Melbourne City Council and various cultural organisations. We offer Mercato Centrale freely for community events, helping raise money and awareness," Gary says.

"We don't ask for anything in return. We just want to be a good corporate citizen."

For more information, visit lavazzamosaic.com.au

Images: DaVinci Gourmet.

DaVinci Gourmet has Flavour Geniuses – influencers and opinion leaders in the international beverage space – stationed around the world.

# Barista 2.0

Amid the surge in signature drinks, the role of the barista is evolving. Barista Equip explores the trends sweeping the coffee market as it becomes the master distributor of DaVinci Gourmet products.

The role of the coffee shop is shifting. While once the majority of coffee shops focused on doing a few things well – mainly coffee and perhaps a single food specialty – many venues are having to diversify to survive. As an increasing number of Australians and New Zealanders are investing in equipment to make quality coffee at home, café owners are having to get creative to attract customers.

Expanding the menu with the introduction of signature drinks is one tried-and-tested method being adopted by venues across the region. Crafted by baristas, these creative concoctions enable café owners to charge a little more for beverages most consumers couldn't easily recreate in their own kitchen.

"With the recent rise in coffee prices and the increasing number of consumers who craft coffee at home, café owners are looking for ways to drive up margins and create a unique point of difference for their venue," says Brett Bolwell, Founder of Barista Equip.

"There is a vast difference in the profit margin between a standard latte and a signature drink crafted with premium syrups and ingredients."

Brett believes the introduction of signature and chilled drinks is not only allowing coffee shop owners to attract back their core customers but also a new demographic of consumers.

"Traditionally, cafés in Australia and New Zealand haven't been focused on the younger demographics. However, this signature drinks movement is being driven by Gen Z, Millennials, and even younger consumers," he says.

"Kids now say to their parents, 'Can we stop at Starbucks to get a Frappuccino?'. This presents a whole new generation to sell chilled drinks to. Over the next five to seven years, the signature and chilled drinks sector is how we're going to be able to drive profit and stay relevant in a rapidly shifting market."

He points to the cold drinks sectors in places such as the Middle East and Asia, which have seen huge growth in the past few years and become international trendsetters for innovation.

As menus at cafés start to change, so too does the role of the barista. In order to devise and then replicate these creative drinks, Brett believes the role is shifting more towards that of a mixologist.

"Your barista is now a mixologist, and that requires a new skillset. Their role is no longer just focused on coffee – it's multifaceted," he says.

"It's a very exciting time to be a barista. There are so many flavour options out there and inspiration coming from coffee scenes right across the world. Some of the creations baristas are producing are incredible."

Aware of this shift in the market, Brett was eager to find a way he could further support his clients across Australia who were integrating an increasing number of signature and chilled drinks into their menus. In 2022, Barista Equip partnered with FloSmart to launch its chilled liquid-dispensing solution. Then, in 2025, the company took its interest a step further by becoming the master distributor of DaVinci Gourmet syrups and sauces in Australia.

"Our focus over the past couple of years has been on cold delivery, so taking over as master distributor of DaVinci Gourmet seemed like a natural next step. The company is without doubt the global leader in this market. There are a lot of other players in the syrups and sauces sector, but DaVinci Gourmet's international reach and network raise it above the competition," says Brett.

"With our FloSmart system, we can deliver up to four liquids direct into a cup or jug at the exact quantity required by the barista. The addition of DaVinci Gourmet to the Barista Equip range means we can now take that final step to become a full-circle solutions provider.

“When it comes to creating signature drinks, you need signature taste. The natural flavours used in DaVinci Gourmet products are proprietary to the brand and manufactured in Malaysia.”

With a huge selection of products covering a wide variety of formats, including syrups, sauces, powder blends, fruit mixes, natural concentrates, and more, DaVinci Gourmet focuses on giving baristas and mixologists a seemingly endless list of creative options. The company is constantly monitoring the world’s food and drink trends to ensure its product catalogue covers both must-have and upcoming flavour combinations. Syrups range from the classics, including vanilla, hazelnut, and caramel, to the wild-card options such as cheesecake, lemongrass, and shortbread.

What’s more, the company partners with influencers and opinion leaders in the international beverage space. These baristas, mixologists, and tea experts are known as Flavour Geniuses, and include 2024 World Barista Champion Mikael Jasin. The ambassadors create recipes that are shared far and wide to help café owners craft new drinks to make their menus pop, as well as sharing tips and tricks on preparation and execution.

As menus at cafés start to change, so too does the role of the barista.

“DaVinci Gourmet’s product range is of outstanding quality, be it the iconic Classic Syrups selection crafted with the lowest sugar content of the market, or the best-seller True to Fruit syrups range made with the highest real fruit juice content compared to other solutions. The team pour so much energy into testing every single product and recipe before it goes to market,” says Brett.

Art, craft, and science are the brand’s pillars and the guiding principles for its innovation. The team consider beverage making as a pure form of art and their mission is to empower beverage artists to create their next masterpieces.

“We believe craft is the celebration of human skills, honing the delicate expertise and savoir faire in the coffee community. We blend our products with science and leverage unique technologies such as natural extraction and sweetness modulation to deliver superior signature taste in every pour,” he says.

Brett believes the rise of signature drinks will challenge the ready-to-drink coffee market that has gained momentum over the past couple of years.

“These fresh drinks are beautifully presented and you can see the skills and creativity that goes into each of them. We’re going to see a lot more fresh products on the market as consumers prioritise health and look for options with less sugar,” he says.

“With signature drinks, you’re selling an experience not a ready-to-drink can on a grocery store shelf. I’m very hopeful this creative movement will help coffee shops across Australia thrive once again.” ■

For more information, visit baristaequip.com.au or apmea.davincigourmet.com

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Merlo Coffee wants to create a strong coffee community in Queensland. Image: peopleimages.com.

# Creating a connected coffee ecosystem

Amid a period of uncertainty for the Australian coffee industry, Nic Fry, CMO of Merlo Coffee, is on a mission to bring the café community together to create a brighter future.

The Australian coffee community are a resilient bunch. Over the past five years, they've faced an unrelenting series of challenges – from COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis to rising coffee prices and supply-and-demand issues.

It's been a testing time for almost all businesses in the coffee supply chain, with farmers battling the effects of climate change, green-bean merchants navigating shipping crises, roasters experiencing never-seen-before prices, and cafés weighing the risk of increasing prices with conserving customers.

Queensland roaster Merlo Coffee hasn't been immune to these obstacles. Over the past few months, the team have explored how they can continue to produce the high-quality beans the family-owned brand is known and loved for while also supporting its network of more than 1500 café partners across Australia. For Chief Marketing Officer Nic Fry, one of the answers is creating a connected coffee ecosystem based on the value of partnerships.

"We really are an industry in crisis. The price of green beans has never been higher and it's putting a lot of pressure on the business model of many of Australia's roasters and cafés," says Nic.

"However, it's at times of crisis that people must come together. There are some problems that we must solve together as an industry – whether that's lobbying government to intervene or figuring it out by putting our heads together. There's a huge opportunity for brands like Merlo to leverage the value of partnerships in the community."

Merlo Chief Marketing Officer Nic Fry believes creating a connected coffee ecosystem is one of the solutions to the industry's current challenges. Image: Merlo.

The busy nature of the coffee industry and the fact many Australian cafés are small businesses in which owners work on the shop floor day-to-day means finding time to connect and share ideas can be difficult. Nic says when visiting Melbourne International Coffee Expo (MICE) in March 2025, she realised Queensland might be missing out on the strong industry communities found in Melbourne and Sydney.

"While the industry has faced these pressures over the past six months, until I attended MICE I didn't think as an industry we were harnessing the conversations. I realised there are thriving parts of the community that are banding together to create change, but perhaps that's what's missing in Queensland," she says.

"As the second largest family-owned roaster in Australia and the biggest in Queensland, I realised we have an opportunity to build something similar here. We need to talk about the value of partnerships and conversations, and do what we can to ensure everyone gets heard."

For Nic, one of the most important factors is helping cafés to build a more resilient business model. She believes learning from the success of others is key, but finding the opportunity to share that knowledge is the challenge.

"When you're dealing with hundreds of busy café owners, it's impossible to find a time that works for everyone. Sure, we could create online resources, but the coffee industry is built on in-person relationships – it's quite traditional in many ways, which makes it unique," she says.

"I'd like to find a format that works for café owners so we can help share this knowledge. As a big roaster, we have the resources to inspire change, so I guess this is my rallying call to get anyone in the coffee industry in Queensland to reach out to us and let us know how we can help."

The CMO plans to organise an educational lecture series that will explore business hacks for café owners. Different members of Merlo's skilled team will share their insights, from the CFO discussing tax and payroll to technicians discussing café efficiencies.

"These lectures are as much about us sharing our knowledge as they are about us asking the café community what information will be of value to them. Perhaps if we have 100 members of the Queensland coffee community in one room, we'll be able to share different perspectives on a collective problem and suggest some solutions," she says.

"It's all about opening up the conversation. At first, I think the lecture series will be aimed at Merlo customers, but we also want to invite members of the wider coffee community to take part in these valuable conversations."

Leveraging the value and power of partnerships is a big part of Nic's vision for a more connected coffee ecosystem in the state. Since its origins, Merlo Coffee has been deeply ingrained in its communities, supporting a huge range of local initiatives through fundraising and support over the past 30 years.

"Merlo has long been a very generous brand and has donated to its local communities since it was established. Unlike many other coffee roasters, Merlo is still owned by two families and hasn't been sold off to a huge international brand. There's power in local partnerships and these non-profit relationships have led to some very long-standing and sustainable partnerships with cafés," she says.

RACHEL BURKE
MELTY
Beans
blend
merlo
1kg

Merlo recently partnered with local artist Rachel Burke to create the artwork for its Melty Beans blend. Image: Merlo.

> "THERE'S A HUGE OPPORTUNITY FOR BRANDS LIKE MERLO TO LEVERAGE THE VALUE OF PARTNERSHIPS IN THE COMMUNITY."

"We have also established partnerships with people in different industries, such as emerging artists, and that's an opportunity for us to also help them grow. For example, we recently collaborated with Brisbane multidisciplinary artist Rachel Burke to bring our Melty Beans blend to life."

While many coffee roasters and cafés don't currently have big marketing budgets for billboard campaigns and television adverts, Nic believes these mutually beneficial partnerships are a great way for coffee businesses to create shared value.

"Coffee businesses don't have spare money to throw at advertising, so these smaller, grassroots marketing campaigns can be hugely beneficial. As a small business, reach out to other small businesses or artisans in your community to see how you could work together to amplify your message and scale up opportunity," she says.

"In the digital world, it can be hard to make your message stand out from the crowd. However, there's an opportunity to leverage your community in the form of user-generated content and collaborating with other brands and people online. Leveraging your community is the most authentic way to grow your business."

Sustainability is another avenue Nic believes will benefit from growing Queensland's coffee community. After seeing the Reground spent-coffee recycling program in action in Melbourne, she'd like to see the initiative in Brisbane – or at least something similar established.

"Getting more customers to use reusable cups and more cafés to responsibly discard their waste takes a communal effort – it often doesn't have a lot of impact if just one business makes a change," she says.

"While we make every effort at Merlo to be as responsible as possible, there's a lot more we could be doing. I'd love to call on the Brisbane community to find out what they're doing to minimise their impact on the environment so we can help support that and also share the initiatives that work with the wider Queensland coffee community. Reground is a great example of the coffee sector coming together to achieve broader sustainability goals.

"The coffee industry is doing it tough at the moment, but I truly believe if we can create a more connected coffee ecosystem we can help each other thrive." ◼

For more information, visit merlo.com.au

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# The art of indulgence

Priestley's Gourmet Delights CEO Xanny Christophersen is on a mission to reinvigorate the cake cabinets of Australia's cafés.

Xanny Christophersen's career with Priestley's Gourmet Delights started at the age of seven. During school holidays, she would help her aunt by packing boxes and delivering cakes.

She's come a long way since those days of being paid with lunch and a can of Coca-Cola – and so has Priestley's.

Now, Xanny is CEO and Managing Director of Priestley's Gourmet Delights, which remains a family-run wholesale bakery specialising in indulgent desserts.

Priestley's produces more than 270,000 units of cake per week in Brisbane, from cupcakes and cakes to slices and tarts. These are sold through distributors to cafés, hospitals, corporate venues, and pubs around Australia.

The business was founded in 1996 by Xanny's aunt, Marilyn Jones, when it was known as Priestley's Fine Foods. At the time, Marilyn collected handmade desserts from Brisbane and distributed them around the Sunshine Coast.

In the three decades since, the company has changed hands, outgrown its location four times, and opened a state-of-the-art factory that harnesses AI-powered technology to increase efficiency.

"We blend innovation with family recipes and a genuine love of sweet treats and indulgent experiences," Xanny says.

"We're constantly looking for new ways to improve our desserts, save time, and serve even fresher products. We've gone from a fresh manufacturer to a frozen manufacturer to keep up with the evolving needs of the café market. The desserts are frozen on site, so it makes them as fresh as possible and is even better in terms of portion and waste control for café owners.

"Our methods might have changed over the years, but we still use many of our original recipes – now with the help of food technologists, French pastry chefs, and mobile autonomous robots. Even though we've implemented AI and automation in our factory, we still finish every product by hand."

Xanny shares many of the same values as café owners, by pairing quality products with the highest-quality ingredients, which she sources locally where possible.

"The coffee industry does the exact same. Café owners want to source the best beans and serve the best possible cup. I think cake is very similar in that sense," she says.

CEO Xanny Christophersen encourages café owners to create moments of indulgence.

Images: Priestley's Gourmet Delights.

"What I love most about Priestley's is that we're family-founded and female-led. We stay true to our values and origin story but ensure our business is forward-thinking. We use innovative production methods and develop new products based on continuous consumer research.

"We're not owned by a global conglomerate and never plan to be. Instead, we serve world-class quality developed by a local team and backed by strong wholesale partnerships."

Priestley's has a dedicated innovation team that stays up to date with trends and market research, allowing the business to launch new products every six months.

The latest range is a collection of new cupcakes inspired by nostalgic flavours, including choc mint, caramel, and white chocolate.

## XANNY'S FAVOURITE DESSERT AND COFFEE PAIRINGS

**Vanilla Slice and chai latte**

Priestley's classic Vanilla Slice features creamy vanilla bean custard between layers of delicate pastry, topped with white ganache and feathered with chocolate. Xanny recommends serving it with a chai latte.

"The rich, warming spices in a chai latte balance out the creamy sweetness of the Vanilla Slice," she says.

**Vegan Mud Cake and oat iced latte**

"Mouth-watering muddy vegan chocolate cake topped with a creamy chocolate rosette sprinkled with zingy freeze-dried raspberries – this is the perfect partner to an iced oat milk latte," says Xanny.

"Because oat milk has a naturally creamy

## *Xanny’s top tips for café owners*

1. Pay attention to visual presentation. Customers eat with their eyes, so focus on how the desserts are presented in the cabinet.
2. Upskill staff so they know what’s in each dessert offering. The more information they can give customers, the more likely they are to make a sale.
3. Offer a dessert each time you take a coffee order. You’ll be amazed how often a simple question will encourage people to enjoy an indulgent treat with their coffee.

and slightly sweet profile, it complements the moist texture of Vegan Mud Cake. This is an ideal combination for those who love sweet treats and follow a plant-based diet.”

**Grandma’s Lemon Loaf and English Breakfast tea**

For those that enjoy an afternoon cup of English Breakfast or Earl Grey, Xanny suggests pairing a pot of tea with a slice of Grandma’s Loaf Cake.

“Our Grandma’s Loaf Cake is a moist and light lemon loaf, featuring a perfect balance of zesty lemon flavour and delicate sweetness. Topped with luscious lemon glaze icing and fragrant rose petals, this elegant treat is ideal for any occasion,” she says.

“The bold flavours of English Breakfast tea cut through the richness of the lemon glaze icing, while the Earl Grey tea is infused with bergamot, which echoes the citrus notes in the loaf.”

**Minted Filled Cupcake and long black**

“Indulge with our dark chocolate mint cupcake. A dark chocolate base filled with refreshing mint cream and topped with smooth mint buttercream,” says Xanny.

“Finished with a drizzle of dark chocolate and a chocolate shard, it’s a nod to mint-choc favourites like Mint Slice, Cadbury Peppermint, and After Eight.”

The perfect accomplice to this indulgent cupcake? An espresso or long black.

“The naturally bitter notes of the espresso and dark chocolate amplify each other without overwhelming your palate, while the cool mint serves as a refreshing contrast,” she says.

**Choc Salted Caramel Tart and mocha**

This decadent dessert features a delicate, crunchy chocolate tart shell filled with salted caramel and layered with smooth dark chocolate ganache. It’s topped with crispy chocolate coated wafer pearls.

“The mocha layers a rich, bittersweet chocolate with a coffee kick, making the salted caramel pop even more,” says Xanny.

**New York Cheesecake and iced coffee**

For this iconic American dessert, Xanny says you can’t beat an iced coffee pairing. Priestley’s version has a traditionally prepared creamy baked New York cheesecake on a biscuit crumb base.

“The creaminess and tartness of the cream cheese and crunch of the biscuit base pairs beautifully with the smoothness of the coffee and cream. This is my personal favourite,” she says. ◘

For more information, visit priestleys-gourmet.com.au

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DRIVE THRU COFFE
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Images: Rise & Grind.

An increasing number of drive-thru coffee concepts are popping up across Australia.

# Fast and curious

Eights years on from launching his drive-thru concept, Rise & Grind Founder Tony Asmar reveals the wins and challenges of the setup and how elevating his coffee offering with The Bean Cartel has been a game-changer for the business.

When Tony Asmar established his first drive-thru coffee shop in Mitcham, Victoria, in 2017, the concept was pretty unique in Australia. Yes, commuters, tradies, and busy parents could pick up a coffee without leaving their car from a string of fast-food outlets, but there were few independent venues offering a quality cup in a drive-thru format.

"I was actually an engineer at the time, but my brother in-law had had success with a similar concept and encouraged me to take the plunge," says Tony.

"I did a lot of research and watched a lot of American business shows like *Shark Tank* and *Undercover Boss* to study how other entrepreneurs have made drive-thru businesses successful."

The United States (US) often sets global trends when it comes to innovation, and Tony could see the popularity of drive-thru coffee gathering steam in its coffee market.

"What works in the US often takes off in Australia – just 10 years later," he says. "I could see there was an increasing demand for convenience in the food and drink sector, but I also wanted to tailor what I created for the Australian market."

While Rise & Grind's two stores – a second opened in Preston in 2023 – focus on speed, ease, and efficiency for consumers like many of the US' drive-thrus, Tony also ensures customers get a personal and service-orientated experience like they would in their neighbourhood coffee shop. To achieve this, the staff come out to the customer at their car and take the order via an iPad PoS system, before the customer drives to the next station where the coffee and food is hand-delivered to the car.

"Customers love it when we remember their orders, so this is something the team always try and do. We are very lucky to have had many of our baristas and servers with us from the start, and we also have many customers who visit us every day," he says.

"We have a real focus on service and that's the benefit of our face-to-face setup. If someone's had a bad morning, we want to be able to put a smile on their face – whether that's through quick service or a friendly chat. Without the customers, we wouldn't be around, so we must value them."

Despite his two venues getting through around 120-kilograms of coffee each week, Tony says the market over the past few years has been challenging. Before COVID-19, business was booming and during the lockdowns Rise & Grind was among the few venues that could continue to operate. However, the reduction in workers going into the office and the rise of working from home has taken its toll.

"Both of our venues are in prime locations on busy main roads. Everything was flowing very well until lockdown, but fewer people are travelling to work now which has been a challenge," Tony says.

"I knew we had a concept that worked, so I was determined to get the numbers back up again. One of the ways we've achieved this is by teaming up with The Bean Cartel to elevate our coffee offering."

Rise & Grind started working with the Melbourne roaster in 2021 and uses its El Rudo blend as standard across both venues. A mix of beans from Colombia, Brazil, El Salvador, Peru, and India, the robust coffee delivers a bold base to a wide variety of coffee serves.

"In a market like Melbourne, providing specialty coffee is key. The Bean Cartel offers a premium product at a great value rate that delivers great taste," says Tony.

"The El Rudo blend works really well with what we do. Our customers enjoy the bold and long-lasting taste of the medium roast."

One of the factors that persuaded Tony to partner with The Bean Cartel was the consistency of the product it provides. With a loyal band of regular customers, he needed a trustworthy roaster that would deliver the same great taste in every cup – whether it was the first or last of the day.

Alongside the consistency of the coffee, the key to delivering this was top-tier equipment. The Bean Cartel team fitted out the two venues with the latest La Marzocco espresso machines and Fiorenzato grinders.

"The consistency of the temperature of the multi-boiler La Marzocco machines means we can guarantee the same quality cup every time. Replacing the grinders sped up our workflow and helped to reduce the time it takes to craft each cup," says Tony.

With so many coffee roasters in the city offering premium machinery and beans, Tony could have partnered with any brand. Yet, he says The Bean Cartel stands out from the crowd thanks to the team's open and personalised approach.

"They are very upfront and honest, and that's what we're all about," he says.

"The team fully understood our concept and have put in the time and effort to build a relationship with us that's helped Rise & Grind to grow. Working with The Bean Cartel is like being part of a big family – and the quality of the coffee just tops off the experience."

RISE &
GRIND
DRIVE THRU COFFEE

Rise & Grind Founder Tony Asmar says partnering with The Bean Cartel has helped him carve out a niche for his business.

The Rise & Grind team are so delighted with the coffee they serve that their partnership with The Bean Cartel is promoted loudly and proudly on the brand's social media and signage. Tony believes shouting about this is another way to attract new customers to the business.

"People in Melbourne are picky about the coffee they drink, so advertising that we partner with The Bean Cartel is a win-win. When people drive past and see the sign, they think 'hey, I can get a great coffee there'," he says.

Over the past year, a series of large coffee companies has ventured into the drive-thru market in Australia, including Starbucks, which opened its first drive-thru in Western Australia at the end of 2024, and Zarraffa's Coffee which is expanding across the country.

While it could seem like Australia is on the cusp of a drive-thru coffee revolution, Tony says the venues might not be the easy money makers they appear to be.

"The drive-thru coffee concept is definitely growing, but there are challenges. The initial build is a huge investment and you need to get the location spot on. There are a lot of things to consider, such as slip lanes, council permits, and where the cars will wait," he says.

"To achieve the speed needed, you also need a big workforce to prepare the coffees. At any time, we'll usually have six members of staff on to keep things ticking over smoothly. Your wages will be ridiculously high compared to the average café."

Despite the challenges he's faced, Tony is excited about the future of Rise & Grind and its partnership with The Bean Cartel.

"We've seen a lot of growth over the past year and by the end of 2025 I'd like to see Mitcham at 100-kilograms of coffee per week and Preston at 50 kilograms," he says.

"If we can achieve that, perhaps I'll start looking for venue number three."

For more information, visit
thebeancartel.com.au or
randgdrivethru.com.au

# Lobbies and lattes

Quality coffee is no longer limited to cafés. Piazza D'Oro explores how its partnerships with hotel group Accor and Maybe Cocktail Festival are facilitating premium coffee experiences in a variety of hospitality settings.

Over the past decade, coffee has become a daily ritual for many people in Australia and New Zealand. Enjoying a premium cup is the norm as taste buds have become attuned to quality beans, expertly prepared by skilled baristas using intelligent technology.

As such, consumers now expect to have access to great coffee in all manner of hospitality venues – not just specialist coffee shops and cafés. One setting that's particularly aligned with this need is hotels, in which overnight guests seek a quality cup with their breakfast or while relaxing in their room.

For Accor, one of the world's largest hospitality groups with more than 5000 hotels and resorts in 110 countries around the globe, offering a coffee experience that complements the venue and its customers' expectations is a priority. Ben Creek, the company's Regional Director Food & Beverage Pacific, says over the past few years hotel customers have come to expect a quality coffee experience, no matter the type of venue.

"For me, coffee should be one of the things we can deliver well no matter the price point of the customer. From economy to luxury, we want to provide a fantastic cup of coffee," he says.

Accor has more than 20 brands in the Pacific region, ranging from economy hotels such as ibis to premium and luxury venues such as Pullman and Sofitel. Ben oversees the food and beverage departments of the group's 440 venues in the region, which range from in-bedroom beverage-making facilities to artisan coffee shops and fine-dining restaurants.

"Within our range of hotels, there are many different tiers of coffee experiences. We're starting to see a shift in the venues that offer a buffet breakfast, with more customers willing to pay more for a barista-crafted coffee," says Ben.

"Although there are still cost-of-living challenges, I think that shows people are happy to pay for an elevated experience, with coffee considered an everyday luxury."

In fact, Ben believes since COVID-19 the role of hotels has started to shift, which has influenced the food and drink offering.

"The hotel is now more of a community place to spend time, whether that's working from the lobby, meeting with friends or family for a coffee, or finishing dinner in the restaurant with an espresso," he says.

BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME
PDO PIN
BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME
COOKIE
PIAZZA D'ORO ESPRESSO

Piazza D'Oro partnered with Maybe Cocktail Festival in April to provide quality coffee for its conferencing events.

Images: Piazza D'Oro.

"It's not just the case in our premium venues but right across the board. The hotel lobby is becoming a space to work, meet, and enjoy a coffee. It's been fascinating to see this change across our locations."

Across its hotels in the region and the Qantas Lounges it manages, Accor serves around 30 million cups of coffee each year. At the end of 2024, the group wanted to uplift the coffee offering across its brands and sought a new roasting partner that could deliver a spectrum of coffee experiences.

"We've got a huge variety of different venues and locations, so it was really important for us to identify those unique needs and find a partner that could match those experiences," says Ben.

After meeting with a range of companies, Accor decided to partner with JDE Peet's, which encompasses brands including Piazza D'Oro, Campos, Hummingbird, Moccona, and L'OR. Ben says that apart from providing consistent quality, one of the biggest factors influencing the group's decision was JDE's commitment to sustainability.

"Sustainability has become a key driver of consumer choice, with many people willing to pay a premium for products that reflect their values. JDE Peet's sustainability program and approach to sourcing were very exciting for us," he says.

"The second element was the training the company provides. Great training that can help us deliver a fantastic experience – from high-volume coffee for conferencing to our specialty coffee shop venues – is essential. The equipment they provide also contributes to us being able to uplift our coffee offering."

Being able to offer a locally roasted product, such as Piazza D'Oro, was also a priority for Ben and team.

"Aussies love to buy Australian-made products and it's the same in New Zealand. It makes the experience feel more authentic and it reduces the carbon impact of the transportation," he says.

"The capability of JDE Peet's to be able to roast the different coffees locally was also a big decision-maker for us."

Piazza D'Oro, which is roasted in Sydney, is served in many of Accor's locations across Australia. Ben believes it's the brand's Italian heritage that makes it a great fit for the group's hotels.

"Many of our guests love that strong, robust Italian-style coffee that Piazza D'Oro is known and loved for. When we established the partnership, our job was to match each brand to the clientele in each of our locations," he says.

Through its new partnership with Accor, the team at Piazza D'Oro were introduced to the hospitality collective Maybe Group, which runs the annual Maybe Cocktail Festival. This year's event, sponsored by Accor, took place from 7 to 13 April and saw 20 of the world's best bars host takeover events across Sydney. For the first time, Piazza D'Oro came onboard as the coffee sponsor.

"We launched the festival three years ago. Our flagship venue, Maybe Sammy, has been in The World's 50 Best Bars list since it opened six years ago. Being part of this global community means not just travelling to, but learning from, some of the best bars in the world, and this festival was our way of bringing that experience home to Australia," says Tess Hayley Mol, Senior Brand Marketing Manager at Maybe Group.

"This year, we welcomed 20 of the world's best bars to Sydney and hosted pop-up events at venues across the city, as well as masterclasses and other events. The festival is impossible to put together without the brand sponsors that support us, which this year included Piazza D'Oro as our coffee sponsor."

As well as providing quality coffee for the masterclass and lecture events, Piazza D'Oro also supplied beans for some of the cocktails. Tess says over the last decade coffee has become an increasingly popular ingredient in cocktail bars.

"For years, coffee cocktails were synonymous with the Espresso Martini, but the category has a much richer history and an exciting future," she says.

"People are more curious and experimental when it comes to coffee and I think education has played a huge role in this. Coffee lends itself well to cocktails and blends beautifully with spirits."

The team at Piazza D'Oro saw the benefit in partnering with an influential event such as Maybe Cocktail Festival as part of its drive to establish quality coffee in a wider range of hospitality venues across Australia.

"The festival was a great collaboration of innovators and artisans of their craft, and being able to bring Piazza D'Oro into that was a match made in heaven," says Ben.

"There's never been a more exciting time for coffee in hotels and other hospitality venues. People are looking for that elevated experience, whether they're at home, staying at a hotel, or in a bar." ◘

For more information, visit piazzadoro.com.au

Ben Creek, Accor Regional Director Food & Beverage Pacific, says hotel customers have come to expect a quality coffee experience.

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The Luna is a "fail-safe" semi-automatic machine that enables users to manually make coffee without the electronic touchpads. Image: Coffee Machine Technologies.

# Powering the workforce

Coffee Machine Technologies introduces the Luna to its collection of Brugnetti espresso machines, a reliable option for a variety of venues and businesses including those in remote locations.

An espresso machine breaking down during the peak morning rush is a pain for any venue serving coffee. While managers or owners of city establishments can usually secure a technician or engineer within an hour or two to fix the problem and get the machine back up and running, for those in regional parts of Australia an issue could means days without being able to serve coffee easily.

With customers all over the country in a wide variety of locations, Coffee Machine Technologies noticed a small gap in its catalogue for a fail-safe machine that would not only be able to keep running if the main touchpads cut off but was also simple to maintain to avoid unnecessary break downs and repairs.

"At Coffee Machine Technologies, we have a diverse range of customers and over the years that's included a lot of cafés in remote areas that want to provide coffee made on a traditional machine for their clients or staff," says Carmelo Corallo, Coffee Machine Technologies National Sales Manager.

"These remote sites are located right across Australia and even abroad in places like Fiji and Bali. Firstly, it's not easy to send a technician to these rural locations and, second, sites such as these often rely on generators for their power. If the electricity supply is temporarily cut off, you may disrupt sensitive electronics which can fail once switched back on, therefore not allowing you to prepare coffee."

To provide a solution for these customers, Carmelo and team sought to introduce a new machine to their collection that would be a "fail-safe" semi-automatic option that enables staff and users to manually make coffee without the electronic touchpads.

Working with heritage Italian machine manufacturer Officine Brugnetti for more than a decade, they chose its two-group Luna model, which offers both manual and automatic espresso delivery in a compact design.

"Brugnetti is a beautiful business featuring three generations of the same family – one of the last original family-owned businesses in Italy. We've worked with them as their Australian distributor for more than 15 years," says Carmelo.

"We have stocked the Brugnetti Giulia two- and three-group manual push-button machine for a while and it's been very successful. The Luna is an extension of this – it's a mid-size machine with a 10-litre boiler, dual steam wands, and integrated shot timers. Yet, the reason we introduced a semi-automatic into the collection was to be able to offer a machine that can manually operate the groups should the touchpads fail or have an issue."

The idea isn't to run the machine manually long term, but instead to have the backup option to allow the operator time to rectify the supply issue or organise for a technician to fix the machine. Carmelo says that even some of the most expensive brands on the market don't have this option.

What's more, the power requirement for the Luna is lower than many other espresso machines of its size and output.

"The Giulia is 20 amps, as are most of the two-group machines we supply, yet the Luna is only 15 amps, which is useful in settings where they may be a restriction of power," he says.

"It's also compact in size, which is essential in many of these workplaces or bars where they are fighting for bench real estate – wasted space on bars doesn't make money."

As well as having a small footprint and providing a more efficient power option, the Luna has been developed to be extremely straightforward to use and provide the barista with all the essential tools they need to operate. Carmelo says its internal design is simple, meaning minor repairs can be completed by engineers and technical staff already on-site.

"Like all Brugnetti machines, it's not a complicated build – it follows the company's philosophy of being very simple yet providing all the tools the user might need," he says.

"If a small part needs to be replaced, we're able to send it to the site and talk their technician through the fitting over the phone. Obviously, we don't recommend people with no experience start taking the machines apart, but skilled tradespeople should be able to make minor repairs easily."

Coffee Machine Technologies doesn't just see the Luna as a good fit for regional sites though. According to Carmelo, the entry-level machine, which will retail for around $6500 when it comes to market in June 2025, is ideal for sports clubs, bars, night clubs, and hotels that want to offer a barista-standard coffee offering, without taking over the bar.

"The machine is built for a range of venues and is simple to use – no matter the team's experience," he says.

"It has programmable volumetric dosages with an integrated shot timer for precise extraction control, E61 groups for optimal thermal stability and uniform extraction, and two cool-touch steam wands for perfect milk frothing, among other useful functionalities."

For venues considering updating or introducing a quality offering, Coffee Machine Technologies recommends pairing the Luna espresso machine with the Fiorenzato F64 EVO Sense grinder.

> "THE LUNA IS NOT A COMPLICATED BUILD – IT FOLLOWS THE COMPANY'S PHILOSOPHY OF BEING VERY SIMPLE YET PROVIDING ALL THE TOOLS."

"The F64 EVO Sense is now our go-to grinder – it's the gold standard. For a user who may not know a lot about coffee, it will change their whole perspective and show them the importance of weight in the final extraction in a very straightforward manner," says Carmelo.

"Most grind-by-weight grinders cost around $5000, but the F64 EVO sense is less than $4000, so it's a great value proposition too."

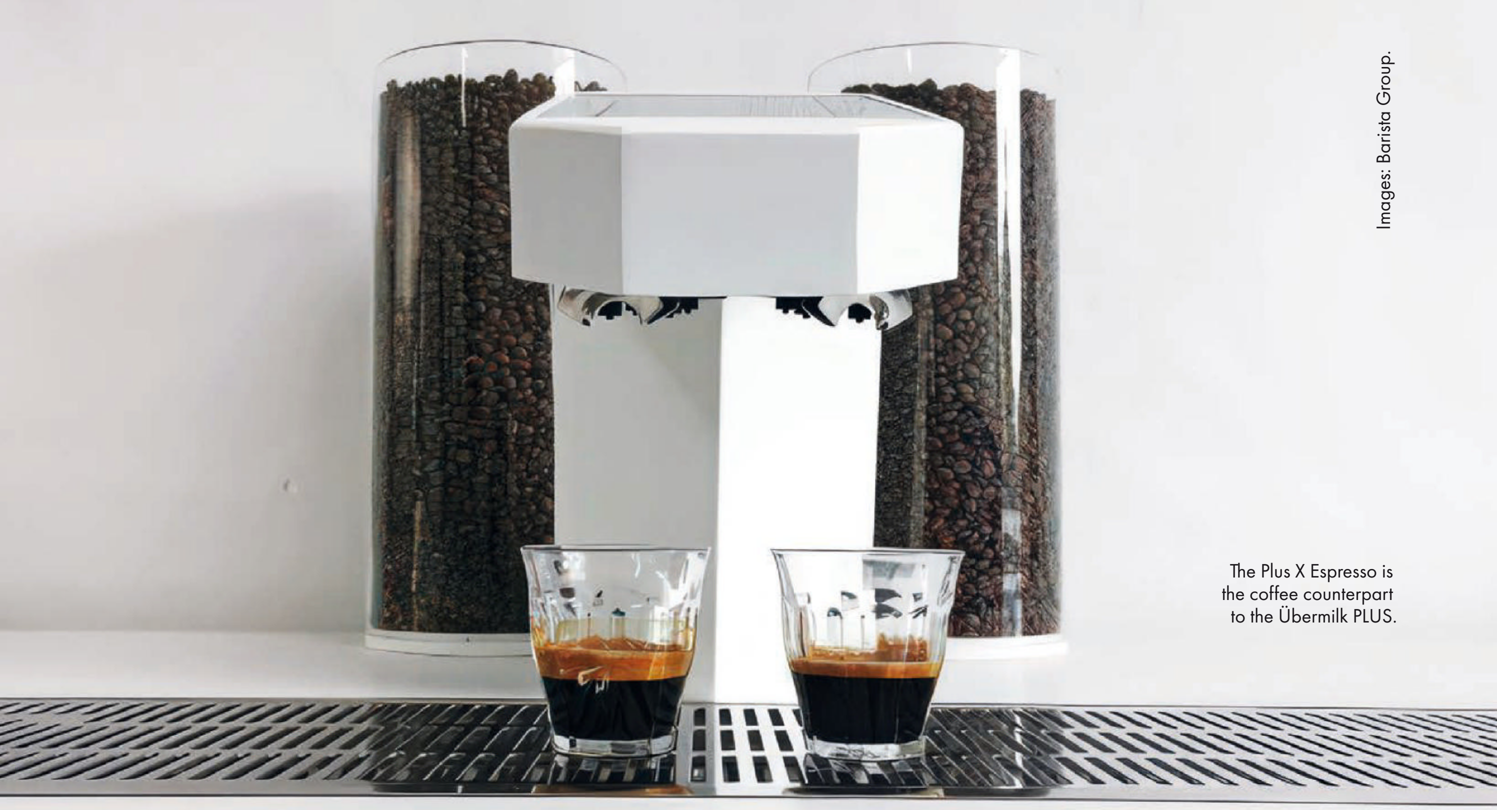
When the team bring the Brugnetti Luna to market in June, they'll also be introducing a new financing model designed to offer a tailor-made finance solution for commercial coffee roasters.

"Effectively, we'll be offering customers a 12-month term for equipment purchases at zero interest. These fixed monthly payments are outside the standard brokering finance much of the coffee industry is used to," he says.

"It's just one of the steps we're taking to support the coffee industry at what is quite a challenging time.

For more information, visit coffeemachinetechnologies.com.au

The two-group machine offers an efficient power option. Image: totojang1977/stock.adobe.com.



Images: Barista Group.

The Plus X Espresso is the coffee counterpart to the Übermilk PLUS.

# Beyond the bench

Barista Group introduces the new under-bench innovation from the creators of Übermilk – the Plus X Espresso.

Scandinavian-influenced minimalist design swept the international café scene in the mid-2010s and has since become a marker of specialty coffee, inspiring coffee shop design around the world. Benches are often sparsely populated with only the purposeful angles of sleek machinery – the focus funnelled to the quality of the coffee.

When Barista Group revealed the Übermilk milk foam and liquid dispensing system to the Australian market in 2023, its modular, under-bench design complemented the trend for a clutter-free counter. Milk and alternatives bottles are replaced with hidden containers, with the mechanics of the machine tucked out of sight beneath the counter. All that's visible to the customer is the elegant spout that can deliver up to three different types of textured milks.

And now the team behind the Übermilk and the Übermilk PLUS – the second generation of the technology that has the potential to deliver up to seven different textured milks and liquids – have developed a coffee counterpart: the Plus X Espresso.

"Like the Übermilk, the mechanics of the Plus X Espresso are completely hidden under the bench. All the customer can see is the outlet head, which delivers the espresso shots, and the two hoppers filled with beans," says Joe Chalhoub, Barista Group General Manager.

"The grinder and the espresso machine are both located out of sight under the counter. Once the coffee has been extracted, it's fed vertically up the machine and delivered through the spout."

The engineers at Übermilk's parent company Innoroc in Germany worked with the team at Eversys in Switzerland to develop the fully automatic espresso machine. The barista simply has to press a button on the intuitive touchscreen interface, choosing between a single or double shot and the two coffees in the hoppers, and the machine does the rest.

"The great thing about the Plus X Espresso is that it frees up the barista to steam the milk and talk to the customer while the machine takes care of grinding, tamping, and extracting," says Joe.

"The Eversys technology means the machine delivers automatic dosing and precise temperature control, resulting in a consistently high-quality cup of coffee."

While Joe believes the hidden espresso machine is a great option for coffee shops looking to create a minimalist setup, he also says it's a great product to supplement traditional countertop espresso machines.

"This is a great option for venues with a high volume of takeaway drinks. The Plus X Espresso can quickly get through a growing queue of orders, while the traditional machine can be used to prepare drinks for sit-in customers," he says.

"This is a very popular setup in Europe, where you see a lot of venues pairing a traditional espresso machine with a super-automatic one to streamline operations. It's not something we have a lot in Australia yet, but I think it will take off in the next couple of years."

Alongside coffee shops looking to improve workflow, Joe also believes the machine is a valuable solution for hospitality venues such as hotels, restaurants, and bars.

"Hospitality venues know most consumers now expect a quality cup of coffee, wherever they are. The Plus X Espresso enables bartenders and baristas to serve a very high standard of espresso consistently without necessarily having the knowledge of how to prepare an espresso on a traditional machine," he says.

"They don't need to know how to dose or tamp – they simply have to push a button on the screen and they'll get the exact same result every time. We've done a lot of testing on the machine and the yield has been extremely consistent. What's more, if the machine is paired with an Übermilk, the user doesn't have to be trained on how to texture milk either."

When the Plus X Espresso and Übermilk PLUS are installed side by side, the process of preparing the coffee is almost fully automatic: the barista only needs to pour the latte art. The combination can not only produce the full range of hot coffee options but also chilled drinks, such as iced lattes, signature drinks, and cold brew.

"Installing these machines also saves a huge amount of space on the counter, which can be used by baristas to craft signature drinks," says Joe.

Witnessing how coffee shops in Europe are embracing automatic equipment, Joe believes the Plus X Espresso and Übermilk PLUS provide café owners with an opportunity to reduce staffing costs amid a challenging climate for coffee businesses in Australia.

"Many café owners in Australia are scared to fully embrace technology like this because they believe they'll lose their point of difference, but that's not the case. Having intelligent equipment like this allows owners and baristas to create a more tailored, personal experience that sets their venue apart from the crowd," he says.

> "MANY CAFÉ OWNERS IN AUSTRALIA ARE SCARED TO FULLY EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY LIKE THIS BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE THEY'LL LOSE THEIR POINT OF DIFFERENCE, BUT THAT'S NOT THE CASE."

"Realistically, the price of coffee beans isn't going to come down any time soon. To remain economically viable, café owners are having to look for smart ways to reduce other costs, such as time spent training staff, operating with a smaller team, and serving customers quicker."

While Europe has long looked to Australia for coffee inspiration, Joe believes we're now trailing behind when it comes to embracing technology.

"Europe is way ahead of us when it comes to fully automatic equipment because it's long been embraced there – they've never been inclined to hide it from customers. Whereas in Australia, for years we've focused on the craft of specialty coffee and that's formed a big part of the coffee identity here," he says.

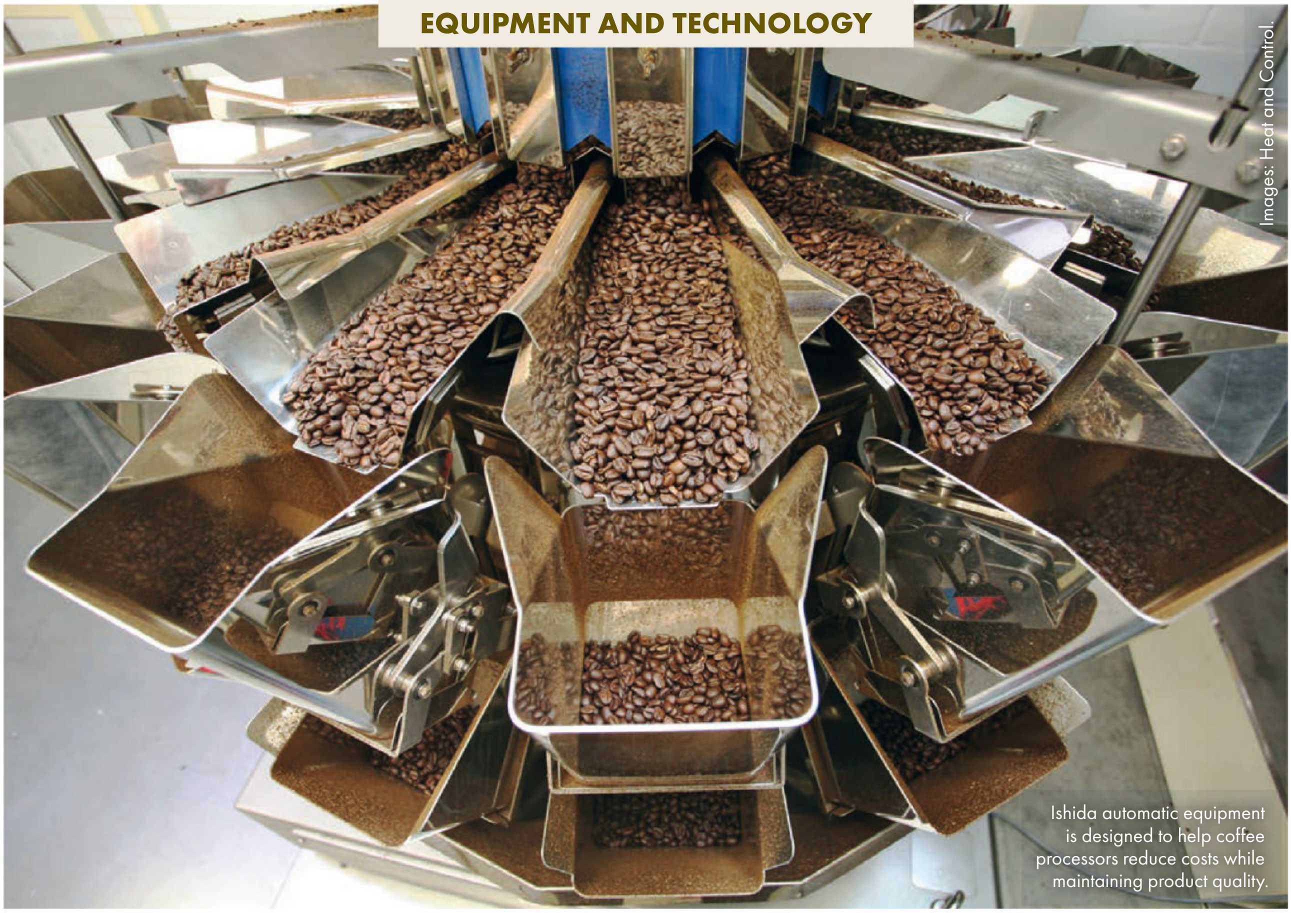
"However, we're now facing rising prices and staff shortages. The average number of years baristas are staying in the profession is going down every year and café owners are having to spend a lot more time training new staff."

So, is Australia ready to embrace a shift – or will the focus on craft continue? Joe believes there are some innovators in the market ready to take the leap.

"Some people think it's a risk but just look at setups like Blank Street in the United Kingdom and the United States, which has been hugely successful," he says. "If café owners want to keep maintaining their profit, eventually I think they'll have to consider introducing automation to their workflow." ◼

For more information, visit **baristagroup.com.au**

The espresso machine was created in collaboration with the team at Eversys in Switzerland.


Images: Heat and Control.

Ishida automatic equipment is designed to help coffee processors reduce costs while maintaining product quality.

# The coffee connection

## Heat and Control is reconnecting with Australia's coffee processors to deliver tailored end-to-end solutions.

From farm to cup, the coffee supply chain faces a complex set of demands — rising costs, narrowing margins, and global market pressures mean efficiency is more critical than ever.

Heat and Control supports coffee and tea processors with a complete portfolio of solutions across preparation, processing, coating, flavouring, drying, roasting, product handling, weighing, inspection, and packaging.

Following its recent debut at Melbourne International Coffee Expo (MICE) 2025 – where the team featured advanced packaging and inspection systems – Heat and Control is reaffirming its commitment to the Australian coffee sector. Its goal: to help processors enhance quality, streamline operations, and remain competitive in an evolving global market.

Founded in 1950, Heat and Control cemented its reputation in Australia's coffee industry through its partnership with PROBAT coffee roasters during the late 1980s and 1990s. This collaboration positioned the company as a leading supplier of roasting and packaging equipment and a trusted partner to many of the country's most recognised coffee brands.

Today, Heat and Control's offering has evolved to meet many of the modern challenges of coffee production. According to Robert Marguccio, Business Manager of Packaging and Inspection Solutions, the company's portfolio now includes a range of innovative solutions designed to address critical pain points of coffee and tea processors of all sizes.

This includes: foreign object detection to safeguard product quality and reduce waste; seal integrity to prevent leaks and preserve product freshness; minimising product waste by optimising yield through precise handling and portioning; automation and quality control to improve efficiency, accuracy, and compliance; and optimising extraction to enable efficient coffee and tea extraction through integrated systems that manage particle size of roasted coffee beans and tea leaves.

With a deep understanding of the industry's evolving needs, Heat and Control continues to deliver tailored solutions that help Australian coffee companies stay competitive in a demanding global market.

"People might remember us for our partnership with PROBAT," says Robert. "But today, Heat and Control is a one-stop shop that goes past just roasting solutions.

"With more than 270 staff across Australia and a manufacturing facility in Brisbane, we don't just sell equipment — we deliver complete solutions.

"In the past, we were primarily known for packaging and inspection systems, up to the point of getting the coffee into the bag. Now, we've expanded our solutions to include integrated systems that support every stage of production — from the initial processing steps right through to final packaging and warehouse readiness."

### LEAK AND METAL DETECTION

With modern technologies like CEIA THS/21 Series metal detectors and Oxipack leak detection systems, Heat and Control aims to help coffee processors reduce product waste while ensuring their products remain fresh, securely sealed, and ready for market.

CEIA metal detectors offer high-sensitivity detection of metal contaminants, even in challenging environments.

Designed to minimise interference from both the product and surrounding production conditions, CEIA is said to be the only brand of metal detectors with multispectrum technology, which enhances detection accuracy while reducing product effect errors, false rejects, and unnecessary waste. They also utilise an advanced auto-test function that allows the system to learn from test pieces, recording signal amplitude relative to the coffee product to improve long-term performance.

Meanwhile, the patented Oxipack leak detection system eliminates the need for destructive water bath testing of coffee products. Utilising a non-destructive method, it allows tested products to be returned to the line when they pass. This sustainable leak detection method protects the integrity of products and reduces wastage of tested products.

## WEIGHING AND PACKAGING SOLUTIONS

Check weighing is key to not only delivering a product that contains what consumers expect but to also limiting waste and giveaway of product.

Robert says the Ishida check weighing solutions and multi-head weigher and baggers, coupled with Volpak horizontal stand-up pouching solutions, offer high accuracy, fast production speeds, and minimal giveaway – all while reducing energy consumption.

These solutions are implemented across a broad range of sectors including snacks, confectionary, and pet food, facilitating high-volume, high-speed production.

Robert says Ishida's reliable automation offers customers a way to reduce costs while maintaining product quality.

"With the way we're going in Australia with industrial relations and energy prices, our customers need to have a way of reducing costs wherever possible, and I think that is going to incentivise looking at systems like Ishida to include high-quality automation at the back end of production," he says.

Whether it be for beans or ground coffee, Ishida weighing solutions are designed to deliver greater accuracy to help customers maintain the trust with consumers and limit product giveaway.

"The Ishida multi-head weigher is the most accurate weigher on the market, a claim backed by extensive testing. The core function of the system is to provide the highest accuracy possible and reduce giveaway," Robert says.

## MICE2025 SHOWCASE

Heat and Control debuted its packaging and inspection solutions at MICE2025 in March, where it showcased automated and energy-efficient solutions to a broad range of customers within Australia's coffee industry.

> "WE ASSIST CUSTOMERS IN LOOKING AT TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP, WE PROJECT MANAGE IT FOR THEM, AND WE CAN GUARANTEE PERFORMANCE OUTPUT."

Its decision to showcase at MICE stemmed from the company's desire to not only meet the evolving challenges being faced by the broader coffee industry but to also provide scalable solutions for coffee businesses of all sizes.

"As a global leader in food processing technologies, we provide fast, accurate, and reliable solutions that help you maintain quality, efficiency, and food safety," Robert says.

"MICE was a great opportunity for us to reaffirm our expertise and showcase how some of these solutions can assist customers from the start to the end of the process.

"We assist customers in looking at total cost of ownership, we project manage it for them, and we can guarantee performance output – we don't just walk away.

"We have more than 15 service technicians around Australia, and we can offer peace of mind to be a complete support for as long as the customer needs. Strong, sustained partnerships like these have shaped our journey over the past 75 years – and it's what will continue to drive our growth for decades to come." ◘

For more information, visit heatandcontrol.com

CEIA THS/21 series metal detectors are developed to reduce product wastage while ensuring products remain fresh, securely sealed, and ready for market.

The Steam Single is Slayer's first espresso machine launch in more than five years.

Images: CWE.

# Single and ready to mingle

To introduce people across Asia-Pacific to its latest machine, Slayer took the Steam Single on a tour of the region and hosted a coffee competition like no other.

There are lots of ways to launch a new espresso machine: host a big party, unveil it at a tradeshow, send it to the world's most influential baristas – the list goes on. Yet, the team at Slayer wanted to do things differently when they introduced the Steam Single to world. After all, it was the company's first new espresso machine launch in more than five years and the industry was fizzing with excitement to see what would come next from the brand.

A new addition to the Steam range, the espresso machine builds on the Steam LP and Steam EP but, unlike its siblings, features an internal freshwater reservoir. For Millie Chan, Cimbali Group Regional Director Asia & Pacific, this launch was different to others. As the brand's first prosumer machine, the Steam Single provides a premium espresso solution for both professional and domestic environments.

"I wanted to take the Steam Single on a journey. At the end of 2024, we took the machine on a small tour of the region to not only introduce it to key players but also to give it the big push that it deserved, because I knew we had to create something unique," she says.

Millie and team had just the idea to get people in the industry talking about the one-group machine – a touring coffee competition that would put baristas through their paces in a variety of skill-based tasks. Kicking off in Auckland, New Zealand, in February, the Slayer Espresso Rally saw 120 baristas in six countries battle it out for a place in the final, which would take place at World of Coffee in Jakarta, Indonesia, in May.

"We started at the bottom of the world in Auckland before moving onto Hong Kong, Bangkok, Sydney, Kuala Lumpur, and finally Jakarta," says Millie.

"There were 20 barista spots at each rally and they filled up very quickly. I wanted the competition to be fun and engaging, not overly complicated or technical like some of the other competition formats out there. That was my brief to John Ting and Hugh McDonnell, our Slayer team in Australia who were tasked with formulating the competition structure."

The duo delivered, devising a coffee competition like no other. It consisted of four rounds, starting with a cupping to familiarise the competitors with the coffee. This was followed by latte art, speed, and dial-in rounds, with a final free-pour latte art round to determine the semi-finalists and winner.

"We wanted to create a competition that showcased the Steam Single. We didn't want to host just another latte art throw down as they take place all the time, so we drew on our experience of visiting coffee competitions around the world," says John Ting, Slayer Regional Product Sales Specialist APAC.

"In particular, the speed round was really fun and engaging – inspired by the baristas' real experience of crafting coffee in a busy venue. It was a challenging round, but it drew on the skills they use every day."

The Australian heat of the Espresso Rally was co-hosted by distributor Coffee Works Express (CWE) and took place at Pablo & Rusty's in Sydney's Macquarie Park on 9 April. John says, like all the international heats, the competition in Sydney was fierce.

"The competition was tough, and the skills of the baristas were impressive, but most importantly they all seemed like they had a great time taking part. The competitors were having fun and the most rewarding part for me was seeing them enjoying using the Steam Single," he says.

Lucky Salvador, who flew down from his home in Darwin to take part in the competition, beat 19 other baristas to be crowned Slayer Espresso Rally Australia Champion. Alongside his title, he also won a spot in the finals at World of Coffee Jakarta in May for the chance to take the crown as the overall champ and win a Slayer Steam Single of his own.

A seasoned pro, Lucky has taken part in competitions across Australia and the Asia-Pacific, yet he says the Espresso Rally was different to any he's competed in previously.

"The competition was unique – it

John Ting (left) and winner Lucky Salvador at the Espresso Rally in Sydney.

caught me by surprise. Because it was an espresso rally, most of us expected it to be only espresso based, but it actually covered different aspects. It was a lot of fun," he says.

"When the format was revealed on the day, I knew I had an advantage in the speed round as that's what I experience in the café every day. I find latte art quite challenging, so I thought that was going to be my downfall, but I actually did quite well on the day."

Lucky has his sights set on the top spot at the finals in Jakarta. While the rounds won't be released before the final showdown, he's concentrating on practising his latte art skills and some signature drinks creations. With a Steam Single up for grabs, he has his eyes on the prize.

"It's a gorgeous machine – one of the most beautiful on the market. For a single group, it includes a lot of great features such as the pre- and post-infusion system," he says.

"The fact you can just plug it in and use it, rather than it having to be plumbed in, is amazing. I would love to have one at home, so fingers crossed I bring one back from Jakarta."

It's not just Lucky who's been impressed by the machine. Since launching in mid-2024, the model sold out almost immediately in the Asia-Pacific region, with stock expected to be available again in June 2025.

"My allocation of Steam Singles sold out within a week – the demand and response to the machine has been overwhelming," says Millie.

"It's not just popular with domestic customers and smaller venues but also roasters who want to showcase their coffees to clients in the roastery. The freshwater reservoir gives users the opportunity to move the machine around, but in professional setups it can also be plumbed into the mains water supply."

Other key features of the Steam Single include its intuitive barista dashboard and user interface, the ability to manually dial in and save the desired shot, and a single pump regulated pre-infusion function. The latter allows baristas to soak the coffee before extraction begins, providing a more even spread of water during extraction.

In April 2025, Slayer's parent company Cimbali Group announced CWE as the exclusive Slayer distributing partner for Australia. ■

For more information, visit slayerespresso.com or cwe.com.au

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Images: Venus Packaging.

Venus Packaging's heat-sealing machines are a popular tool among Australian coffee roasters.

# Sealing the deal

Venus Packaging reflects on more than half a century of business, and providing packaging solutions for Australia's coffee roasters.

Australia has a proud history of local business and the phrase "Australian made and owned" is worn as a badge of honour to this day. With more than 65 years of experience in the packaging industry, Venus Packaging embodies the independent Australian spirit with its long-standing family history and customer-first approach.

The Victorian company specialises in a broad range of packaging supplies to support an array of businesses and industries across the country. That includes the coffee sector, which the team at Venus Packaging have worked alongside for decades, forming loyal relationships and providing solutions through its range of products.

Melbourne roaster Jasper Coffee is one business that can attest to the longevity of the Venus brand. When the packaging company recently sponsored the Coffee Industry Heroes awards in which Jasper Coffee Co-Founder Wells Trenfield posthumously received the Legacy Award, Wells' Co-Founder and partner Marilyn Parker fondly reflected on purchasing a Venus heat sealer as one of the roastery's first pieces of equipment in the 1980s.

"To be mentioned by Jasper Coffee is a testament to how long our machines have been working and operating within the coffee industry," says Laura Venus, Venus Packaging Co-Director.

## MADE TO LAST

Laura believes Merilyn's anecdote exemplifies the endurance of Venus' products. She says the team continually strive for the highest quality – an ethos that's underpinned the business for decades.

"Our products really are made to last, and it has become our motto of sorts. It's the Venus quality that keeps our customers coming back," she says.

"We aren't a company that focuses on getting the cheapest materials available or the easiest to source. We have experience in sourcing machinery from all over the world and we've been doing this for nearly 70 years."

The combination of product knowledge and a specialised servicing and sales team means Venus customers are in experienced hands.

"We have been in business for a long time and we are privately run. We work hard for the customer every day," says Laura.

"There's no magic wand or someone else doing the work. It's our team working every day to make sure we're getting the right product at the right price for our customers."

## NEW BEGINNINGS

While Venus Packaging is rooted in its history, it's also forward thinking. The business recently opened a new purpose-built facility in Coburg and now employs about 30 staff members. The new facility has the capacity to supply packaging products for coffee businesses of all sizes.

Among its most popular equipment with coffee customers is its heat-sealing machines, followed by the foot-pedal operated heat-sealers, band sealers, vacuum chambers, and handheld heat-sealers. The heat-sealing products are designed to create an airtight seal on bagged products that require freshness, such as coffee beans.

Venus Packaging also specialises in custom-printed tape, carton sealers, tape dispensers, and glue guns.

"Anything to do with the dispatch of coffee, we have it covered," says Laura. "We have different variations of the sealers depending on the size of the roaster."

For a startup, Laura suggests using a smaller machine that's economical and easy to set up and maintain.

"If you're only doing 50 to 100 bags in a production session, you might want to get something like one of our VHS Heat Sealers or a VHIB Heat Sealer," she says.

For medium-size operations, Laura suggests an 882 Band Sealer that operates on a conveyor belt.

"When a coffee bag is being sealed on the conveyor belt, it's a lot faster. When you get to a larger scale, you can look at our 552 Band Sealer, which is European made," she says.

For high output roasters, having a simple and efficient process can not only streamline the production of the coffee but also improve staff satisfaction in using equipment that's easy to use.

"We know all about the production deadlines and the pressure to get stock out quickly to customers or to retail stores. The 552 Band Sealer is most advantageous as it's ultra efficient and easy to operate," Laura says.

"The thing about this particular band sealer is that you can accommodate different bag sizes, so it's versatile."

## A SPECIALISED TEAM

With a sales and account team specialised in specific industries, Venus customers can speak with a rep that understands their business needs and requirements. Laura highlights how the sales and account executives are the first point of call for potential coffee customers.

"Our sales executives are very experienced in the coffee industry. They know what sort of machine to recommend for different applications," she says.

With a flexible approach to new and existing customers, Venus Packaging accommodates a range of equipment testing.

"For example, samples of the coffee bags roasters are using can be sent to us. We can test them on our machines and either send the sealed bags back or invite them to visit us in Coburg for a live demonstration," says Laura.

"They're welcome to bring in their own bags of coffee and try them on three, four, or even five different types of machines to see which one works best. That way, they can see which machine handles their specific bag type most effectively."

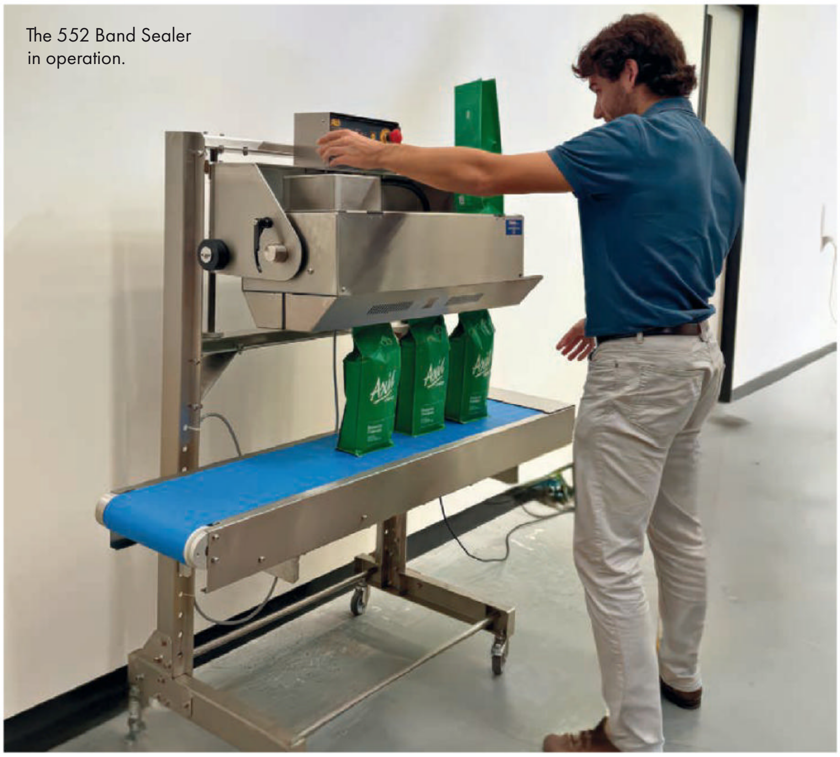
The team at Venus Packaging also offer testing opportunities for the seal and output a customer may be looking for.

"We can do the sealing here, record a video of the process, and send it back to them so they can see how their bags perform and choose the best sealing option for their needs," says Laura.

While Venus strives to uphold its motto of providing equipment that's built to last, it employs a comprehensive servicing and spare parts team to ensure its customers have peace of mind.

"Spare parts are something customers can have sent to them if it's just a small thing like a replacement," says Laura. "They don't have to bring the machine in. Most of our heat-sealing machines only require simple maintenance."

With customers in the Melbourne area, interstate, and overseas, Venus Packaging has partnerships with external service providers too.


The 552 Band Sealer in operation.

Venus Packaging Directors, siblings Laura and Tim Venus.

"We've sold these machines all over the country. So, if or when they need servicing that option is available for our interstate customers. It is very convenient for businesses as they don't have to send it to Melbourne to get the repair or service done," says Laura.

## COMMUNICATION IS KEY

According to Laura, understanding roasters' needs is key to communicating and interacting with Venus' customers.

"It's really about getting back to customers very quickly, understanding their needs, being prompt in replies, and following through with what we say we're going to do," she says.

With a long history and a handful of staff that have been working at the business for more 30 years, Laura explains how and why the business works well.

"The range of industries, equipment, and servicing we cover is something that makes us stand out," she says.

"I believe our offering and capabilities are what keeps our customers coming back. They know we understand them. We are very established in multiple industries. We didn't start a few years ago, we have been here for decades and we're here to stay."

Cementing the business in the packaging industry as a trusted, long-standing, and reliable business, Laura emphasises how its specialised teams can help to streamline businesses in an array of different industries.

"We know exactly who's buying what, and we always check in with our customers," she says.

"The team knows what works best for our coffee customers and we provide a service that goes beyond the initial buying of the product." ◘

For more information, visit venuspack.com.au

Images: Autesso.

Quality coffee is becoming an integral part of the overall customer service experience in a variety of business settings.

# The business case for better coffee

With Franke's advanced automation driving evolution, there's a new generation of businesses redefining where and how great coffee is served.

The best coffee you drink this week might not come from a café. It could be served at a car dealership, a university campus, or even a logistics depot.

Specialty coffee, once confined to the café, is showing up in places no one expected. As expectations rise, consumers' preference for excellent coffee is showing up in every part of their day – from study and work to appointments with lawyers or mechanics.

This growing demand is driving a shift across the industry and automation is helping make it possible. That's where Autesso has carved out its niche.

As one of Australia's leading workplace coffee specialists and an approved Franke partner, Autesso designs tailored coffee programs for environments where baristas might not make sense but standards still do. With a team of technicians and experts, it's helping reshape how Australians experience coffee in workplaces, showrooms, depots, and everything in between.

Backed by Franke's automated technology, this shift is also creating new expectations and new opportunities, for workplaces, roasters, and coffee professionals alike.

## BEYOND THE CAFÉ

In the past, office coffee was synonymous with instant granules or outdated vending machines tucked into the corner of a kitchen. It was functional but forgettable. Today, coffee plays a very different role.

"We're often called in to replace an outdated coffee setup," says Xenia Alexander, Autesso Co-Owner and Managing Director.

"More often than not, it's a powdered milk machine with an 'out of order' sign on it. In its place, we install a Franke, which is a serious investment in quality equipment. That shift alone tells you how much coffee's role in the workplace has evolved.

"When the pandemic interrupted access to cafés, it didn't dampen consumers' appetite for great coffee, it highlighted how much they valued it. That expectation followed them back into the workplace."

Today, coffee is more than a caffeine hit, it's a signal of culture, care, and brand experience. In many workplaces, it's a litmus test for how a business values the everyday experience.

"Coffee features in Google reviews and staff surveys more than you'd expect," says Xenia.

"It's consistently one of the things people remember and comment on. It might seem like a small detail, but it leaves a big impression. For both customers and employees, it signals that quality matters here."

That expectation isn't limited to high-end offices: it's showing up in places the industry previously ignored.

"In warehouses and depots, great coffee becomes essential fuel for shift workers with limited access to cafés. In car showrooms it adds a layer of luxury that supports the sales process, and at universities it's a meaningful student perk," says Xenia.

## THE RISE AND RISE OF AUTOMATION

Much of this is possible thanks to the progress of automation. According to Joshua Averes, Autesso Co-Owner and Head of Systems and Operations, Franke's A Line has helped redefine what automatic machines can do. He says they offer consistency, customisation, and a design aesthetic that rivals traditional café setups.

"Whether it's a small 20-person office or a high-volume training facility, there's a Franke machine to suit," Joshua says.

"From the compact A300 to the powerhouse A1000, the range lets us tailor performance to the environment.

"Anyone can use them. That's the beauty of one-touch systems, you no longer need a staff member who's been trained on the machine. Anyone can walk up, press a button, and get a great coffee. It democratises quality coffee across a whole business and means more people actually use it."

Design plays a large role too, and Franke's award-winning machines are designed to be on show.

"The look of the machine really matters in a customer-facing space, but it's something people often overlook," Xenia says.

"Franke machines feel more like an architectural feature than a piece of catering equipment, and we've seen clients build entire fit outs around the machine."

## DIALLING IN FOR TASTE AT SCALE

Despite all the tech, taste remains the most important factor.

"Every sip is a judgment, not just on the coffee but on us and Franke," says Xenia. "That's why the in-cup experience is everything."

Autesso doesn't just supply machines, it also engineers the experience to suit both the coffee and the setting.

"Anyone can resell a machine," says Joshua, "but it's not enough to plug it in and walk away. Like any piece of high-end equipment, they're incredibly nuanced. When they're calibrated properly, the result can surprise even the most seasoned coffee professionals."

And while automation makes these setups possible, it's far from one-size-fits-all.

"Different workplaces have different needs," says Joshua. "In a depot, we might adjust the grinder and extraction for speed to keep lines short during quick coffee breaks. In a showroom, it's all about personalisation and theatre: steam wands, more complex flavour profiles, even custom drinks like dirty chai or Melbourne magic."

The missing link, he says, has been connecting craft with automation.

"For too long, automatic setups were treated as an afterthought, something functional, not finessed. But great coffee, even with automation, still relies on the human touch. Behind every cup, whether it's from a traditional machine or a fully automatic, is still a team of people."

With more than 200 Franke coffee machines currently under management, Autesso supports more of them in the field than any other provider in Australia.

## A NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR ROASTERS

This shift presents a real opportunity, not just for businesses but also for specialty roasters.

"In the past, some roasters avoided automatics or passed up opportunities because they didn't want it reflecting poorly on their brand," says Xenia. "Now, we're seeing much more interest in what's possible."

Autesso works closely with roasters to get the best out of their coffee in self-service environments. That means calibration, recipe refinement, and constant testing. There's also growing potential for creative development.

"A lot of coffees taste good through the Franke, but some really shine, and there are reasons for that," says Xenia. "Extraction time, roast profile, dose, and grind setting – it all plays a role. It's not always as simple as dropping in any blend. We see this as an exciting area to explore with roasters who want to get the absolute best out of these machines."

She believes this shift isn't a threat to industry, but a chance to expand.

"Offices, showrooms, and depots may not have baristas, but with the right machine and support they can still serve high-quality speciality coffee at scale."

## MEETING THE DEMAND FOR CHOICE

In addition to flavour, today's generation of coffee drinkers expect choice. That was clear at this year's Melbourne International Coffee Expo, where the fastest-growing trends included dairy alternatives, iced beverages, and personalised recipes.

With machines that can handle up to 250 custom drink profiles, adjustable strengths, and iced modules that cool espresso on demand, Franke's A Line can cater to this broad and changing set of preferences.

This quality and versatility are why Autesso works exclusively with Franke, a decision that, according to Xenia, is deliberate.

"In this space, there's no shortage of new brands and lower-cost options popping up, but Franke remains the benchmark. We've tested the alternatives, and so far, nothing else has matched their performance over time."

She points to the A600 as a standout example. "It changed the game when it was introduced and it still surprises us with its reliability. Like the Boeing 737 of the fleet, it just keeps going. We've seen machines in the field running well beyond their expected life span. This kind of longevity matters, not just for ROI but for sustainability too," she says.

And the future?

"As workplaces evolve and specialty expectations rise, the question is no longer whether automation belongs", she says.

"It's about how we make it exceptional. With the right machines, the right setup, and the right partners, there's a huge amount of potential still to unlock." ◘

For more information, visit coffee.franke.com or autesso.com.au

Autesso Co-Owners Xenia Alexander and Joshua Averes.

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MICE2025 welcomed more than 31,000 visitors over three days.

# A new era of MICE

Now the dust has settled after a record-breaking Melbourne International Coffee Expo in March, the industry reflects on the landmark event and looks forward to MICE2026.

With more than 31,000 attendees filing into the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre over three days, the energy at Melbourne International Coffee Expo (MICE) 2025 was electric.

More than 130 exhibitors put on a thrilling show for attendees, while an extended lineup of educational content built a busy schedule of talks, panel discussions, and hands-on workshops. Queues snaked around the show floor as DJs spun tunes, baristas peacocked their incredible skills, and industry friends caught up over a cracking cup of coffee.

"We were thrilled with the response to MICE2025. We had put in the hard work to make the event the best yet, but we couldn't believe just how many people engaged and came through the doors," says Siobhan Rocks, General Manager Events at Prime Creative Media.

In the year running up to the event, Siobhan and the MICE organisers assembled an advisory committee of industry leaders to ensure the event continues to serve the needs of the international coffee community. The group, which included representatives from La Marzocco, San Remo, Service Sphere, Single O, Bombora, ST. ALi, Riverina Fresh, and Veneziano Coffee Roasters, provided feedback on previous events and put forward suggestions to make the expo bigger, better, and more valuable for exhibitors and attendees.

One of the most successful ideas to come out of the committee was the introduction of the Roasters Playground, supported by La Marazocco and Riverina Fresh, which saw a rolling roster of some of Australia's best roasters slinging shots, hosting competitions, chatting coffee, and more across the three days.

"We knew that getting a wide variety of roasters to MICE was the key to a successful event and the Roasters Playground exceeded our expectations," says Siobhan.

"It was amazing to see attendees exploring the Playground, popping to different stands to experience all the incredible coffees on offer. It was by far the busiest area of the show floor – the coffee was flowing and the vibes were high."

Of course, putting on a show like MICE couldn't be possible without the support of incredible sponsors. Australian-owned barista milk company MILKLAB has been a huge part of the event for the past eight years and is known for putting on some of the best and most immersive activations for attendees.

"MICE2025 was an incredible experience overall – it was packed with unforgettable moments," says Sheridan Smith, MILKLAB Marketing Coordinator.

"One of our highlights was definitely our strawberry matcha drinks. At some points, there was a 45-minute queue which was unbelievable – we certainly didn't expect that – but becoming a crowd favourite was pretty exciting."

As part of its sprawling stand that included a chequered dance floor and

MILKLAB brought the party vibes with a chequered dancefloor and DJ booth.

DJ booth, MILKLAB also put on a Royale Tasting Experience, which gave attendees the opportunity to sample some of Australia's top roasters paired with MILKLAB products. Attendees had even more reason to get stuck in and put their best foot forward with a daily $500 cash prize.

"The hour-long workshops were super successful and had really great energy," says Sheridan.

"The passion and talent on display overall at MICE was a really cool thing to witness. I think this year's atmosphere was absolutely electric."

The MILKAB roaster experience drew crowds of curious coffee lovers who wanted to sample unique Australian coffees in different formats.

"Our latte art showdowns are always fan favourites. Our baristas really push the boundaries on technique and creativity, and it was so entertaining to watch," she says.

"The baristas turned it into a must-see performance and the engagement from the audience really proved that."

As part of its café community ethos, the MILKLAB team ensured they kept the crowd energised and excited throughout the three days of the event.

"We tried to make sure we had an energetic lineup of live DJ sets to keep the atmosphere really vibrant. We tried to incorporate that throughout the whole MICE experience where we could," says Sheridan.

"I think the MICE team and the organisers have done a phenomenal job this year, it's been really encouraging for the exhibitors and sponsors."

For 2026, MILKLAB is already brewing up some exciting ideas to bring even more energy to MICE.

"We are buzzing with ideas for MICE2026. We always try to raise the bar every year, committed to pushing the limits of creativity and connection in the coffee industry," she says. "Stay tuned for next year, it's an exciting time for the future of coffee."

Another company that made a big impact at MICE2025 was Huskee, which teamed up with the event organisers to reduce the environmental impact of the show. Exhibitors were encouraged to serve coffee in Huskee Borrow cups that could be deposited in bins to be washed and reused.

Michael McFarlane, Head of Sales and Marketing at Huskee, says the success of the project was a result of a true collaboration between MICE and Huskee.

"We're really proud of what we achieved this year," says Michael. "The fact we delivered reusable cups at that scale for a coffee event is amazing. To my understanding it's certainly an Australian first, and potentially a world first."

The scheme is estimated to have saved about 40,000 single-use cups from going into landfill over the course of the event, with the Huskee team washing every vessel.

"We incentivised people to download our app and then return their Huskee cups to be eligible for a prize," says Michael.

"We have a loyalty system in our app through which users earn points every time they reuse. MICE was a fantastic opportunity to trial the system to discover what really incentivises people to make the change to reusable."

As well as soft launching the new Borrow scheme, the Huskee team used MICE as an opportunity to build on its relationships with the Australian coffee community.

"It was great to connect with different

Huskee Borrow cups were used across the event to prevent single-use waste going into landfill.

people across the industry – from coffee roasters to café owners – and speak to them about what a reusable future can look like," says Michael.

"We started some great conversations about our cups, app, and smart bin too."

Returning for 2026, Huskee is focussed on the large scale, behind-the-scenes operation of cleaning the reusable cups.

"Essentially, the challenges we experienced in turning around the cleaning of the cups leave us excited for next year," he says. "We are now clear on how we can come back bigger and better."

One of the most popular products available to sample throughout the event was the Crema di Caffe at the Riverina Fresh Milk Bar. The soft-serve coffee treat from the Riverina team was a huge hit, with queues for a cup trailing around the Roasters Playground.

Riverina Fresh Executive Chairman and CEO Craig Shapiro, a member of the advisory committee, was thrilled to see the success of the Crema di Caffe and the new Roasters Playground area.

"For Riverina Fresh, the number one highlight was the re-engagement with the coffee roaster community," says Craig. "The Roasters Playground really helped with that.

"It was an incredibly buzzy atmosphere across the three days. Having retail and trade visitors every day of the event definitely added to the atmosphere. There were people everywhere and there was so much interest, curiosity, and excitement from everyone who attended."

MICE will return in 2026 from 26 to 28 March.

Pleased with the outcome of this year's event, the team at Riverina Fresh are excited for the future of the show.

"We were really happy with how we engaged this year at MICE. The novelty of having the Crema di Caffe on our stand is something we will definitely implement again next year. It worked a treat," says Craig.

"In 2026, I would love to see the Roasters Playground positioned in the middle of the event with all paths leading to the roasters. At its core, that is what the event should always be about.

"Riverina Fresh has been a long-standing partner of the specialty coffee industry and our commitment to the sector is as strong as ever. We look forward to MICE2026."

Following the success of MICE2025, organisers have announced MICE2026 will take place from 26 to 28 March 2026 at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre. Stands are available to book now, interested parties can find details on the MICE website.

For more information, visit internationalcoffeeexpo.com

GYPSY ESPRESSO
A handful of the roasters who took part in the Roasters Playground.

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# Service showdown

WorldSkills Australia is nurturing the next generation of top-tier hospitality talent, with Australia gearing up to send its competitors to the international showdown in 2026.

Think of the Olympic Games, but instead of athletics, it's the art of service, where top hospitality trainees battle it out in the WorldSkills Australia Restaurant Service Competition. Participants are judged on their customer interactions, attention to detail, communication, and food and beverage knowledge, for a chance to go head to head with national and international competitors.

Since 1981, WorldSkills Australia has empowered young Aussies to excel in their trades through competitions, training, and industry collaboration. The organisation has supported more than 100,000 apprentices and trainees, many of whom have gone on to represent Australia internationally, while helping address skills shortages and uphold the country's reputation for vocational excellence.

WorldSkills competitions provide an enriching addition to traditional training for front-of-house roles in restaurants and cafés, with competitors honing their professionalism, presentation, and ability to work under pressure. The National Championships and Skills Show occur every two years, with the next edition set to take place from 12 to 14 June 2025 at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre in Queensland.

The competition begins at the grassroots level, with more than 6000 apprentices, trainees, and students competing across 34 regions in Australia. These regional rounds serve as the initial stage, testing the skills and knowledge of participants in various hospitality disciplines, including food and beverage service, customer relations, and communication. Medal winners from these regional events have the opportunity to advance to the National Championships & Skills Show.

Throughout both the regional and national competitions, participants are judged on various key skills. These include customer interactions, attention to detail, communication, and their knowledge of food and beverages. The competition is designed to simulate real-world hospitality environments, allowing trainees to demonstrate their competence in handling customer requests, managing time efficiently, and presenting food and drinks to the highest standard.

The format of the competition tests participants in multiple aspects of front-of-house service, including table setting, order taking, and delivery of food and beverages.

WorldSkills Australia empowers young Aussies to excel in their trades through competitions, training, and industry collaboration.

Image: WorldSkills Australia.

At the conclusion of the National Championships & Skills Show, winners receive gold, silver, and bronze medals, with the top performers earning the opportunity to represent Australia in the WorldSkills International competition, which takes place every two years. The next event will be in Shanghai in 2026, providing a platform for the best competitors from around the world to demonstrate their skills on a global stage.

Australia is preparing to send its top talent to the 2026 WorldSkills International Competition in China. Selected from the 2025 National Championships, the best performers will train for 12 months to compete at the global level, gaining industry recognition and expanding their career opportunities.

Many former competitors are said to have gone on to secure high-profile jobs, contracts, and leadership roles in their fields.

Abbey Kuhnell, who was awarded the Medallion for Excellence for Cookery at the International Competition in Lyon in 2024, says although she had completed an apprenticeship while in Year 12 and commenced a Certificate III in Cookery, the competition provided her with exposure to skills she would not have otherwise gained.

"A standout moment for me was getting to the Euro Expo in Lyon for the first time and seeing all the countries and competitors. I gained specialised skills that I wouldn't necessarily gain from just working in a kitchen, such as learning how to make bread to working with a pastry chef for a week just on making desserts," she says.

"Since returning from the competition I feel more confident handling new tasks that are given to me and I'm able to learn and adapt a lot quicker than before the competition and training."

Meanwhile, Elliana McRae, who was also awarded the Medallion for Excellence at the International Competition in Lyon for Restaurant Service, says stepping out of her comfort zone contributed to her growth enormously.

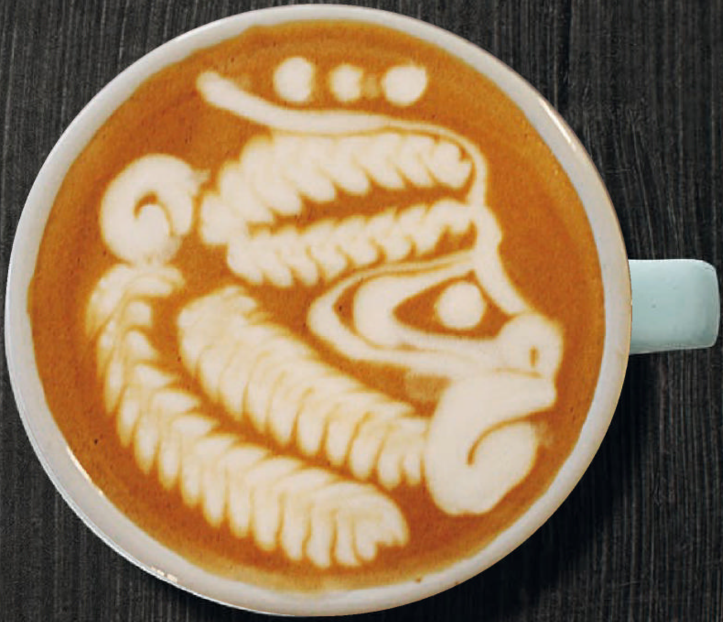
"My journey to representing Australia in Restaurant Service was one of hard work, passion, and friendship. France was my first time travelling internationally and I was blown away by everything I gained from the experience. I not only got to grow and succeed alongside my fellow Aussies but also deliver world-class service alongside 32 world-class competitors," she says.

"This experience taught me so much about myself and the strength of those around me. My persistence throughout this journey is a reminder that in hard times I can do anything I put my mind to."

For more information, visit worldskills.org.au

Victor Vu of Ona Coffee Melbourne is the 2025 ASCA Australian Latte Art Champion.

# Monkey king



Three-time Australian Latte Art Champion Victor Vu shares the steps to recreate the popular monkey king design.

This design was first created by Hill Wang in China and has been reproduced thousands of times by baristas around the world, including Victor.

"It's a very popular pour because it looks quite realistic. A lot of customers recognise it too, so it's a great to design to practise in a café setting," he says.

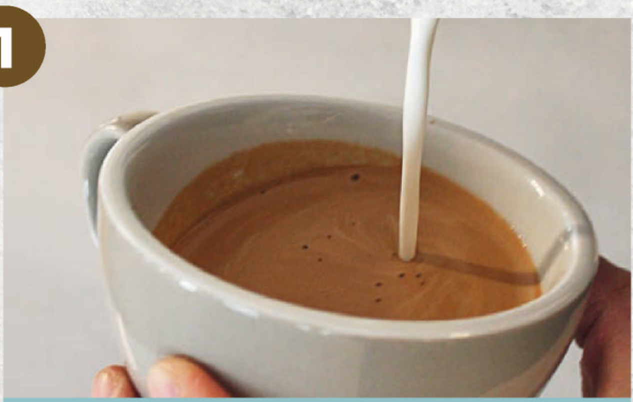
The monkey king design draws on a number of latte art skills, including pouring rosettas and dragging the milk to form the features of the monkey's face. Victor says it requires quite a lot of practice to get it right but is a crowd-pleaser once it's been finessed.

While Victor earned his third Australian Latte Art Champion crown in March, he won't be attending the World Championship in Geneva in June due to the imminent arrival of his first child(ren – Victor is expecting twins). Runner up and colleague Ming Wan will be representing Australia in his place, with Victor securing a place in the 2026 World Championships, which will be held in San Diego, United States.

"I'm helping Ming to train for the World Championships – I'm really confident in his abilities and know he'll do really well," says Victor.

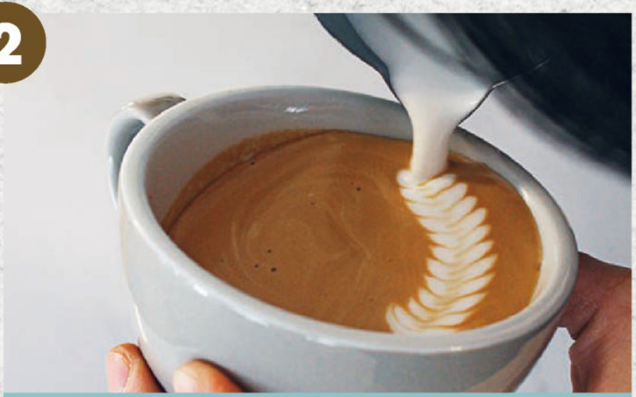
"I'll be watching and cheering him on from home."

**1**



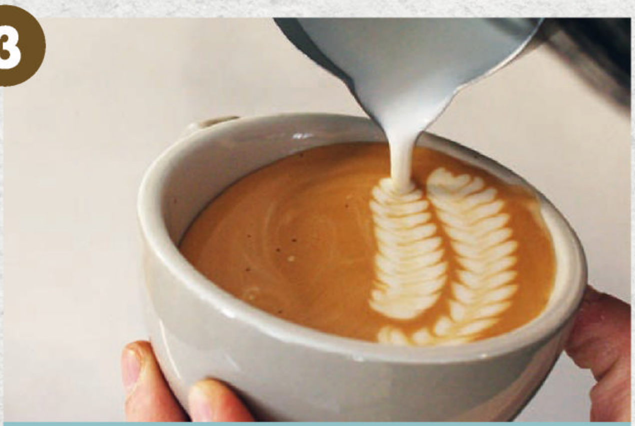
Using a six-ounce cup, start mixing the milk with the coffee until the cup is around a third full.

**2**



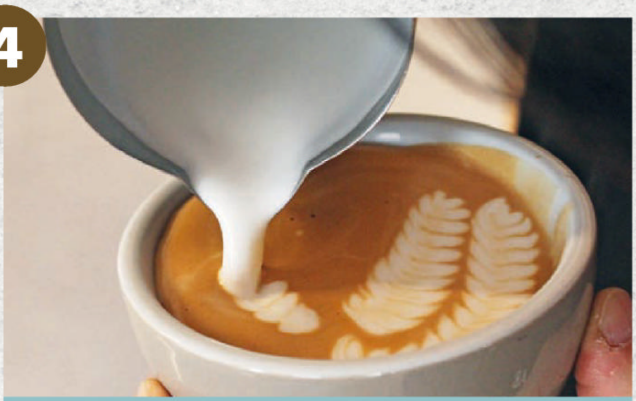
From the nine o'clock position, pour a 12-leaf rosetta down the left-hand curve of the cup.

**3**



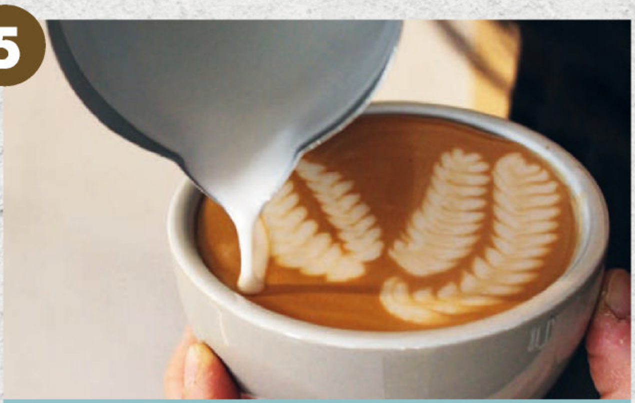
To the right of the first rosetta, pour a shorter 10-leaf rosetta.

**4**



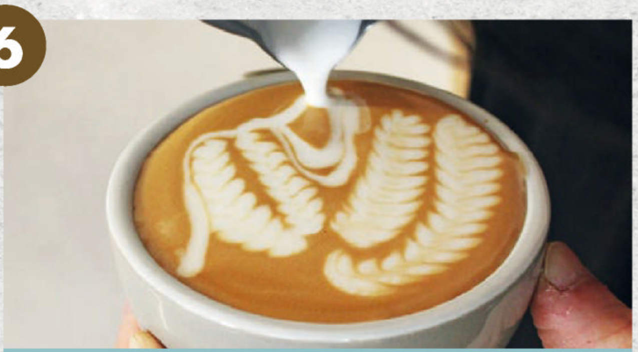
Turn the handle of the cup to three o'clock, from the 12 o'clock position pour a small eight-leaf rosetta to form the monkey's forehead.

**5**



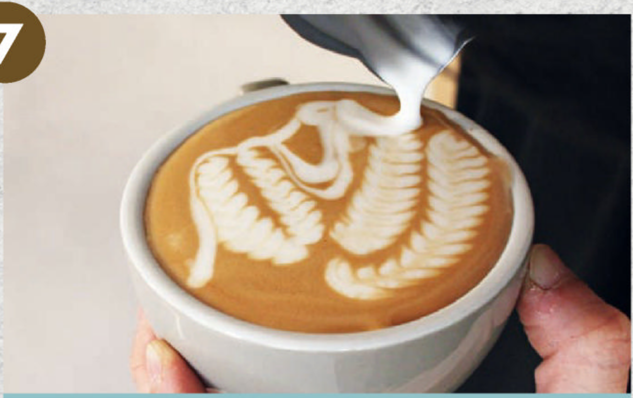
Pour another eight-leaf rosetta under that, then using a continuous pour pull up around the forehead to the top of the cup to form the crown.

**6**



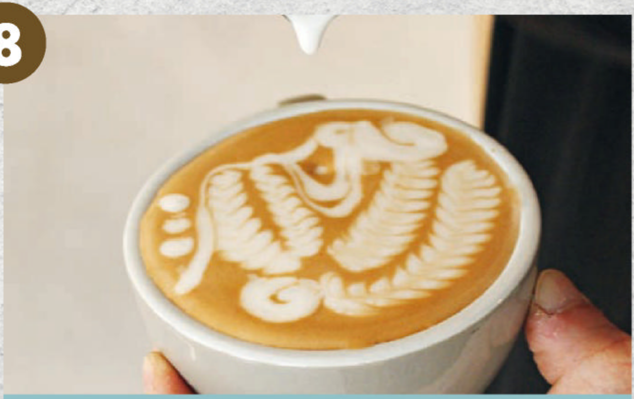
From the same point of the final rosetta, drag a V-shape to form the inner face, then at the end reverse and go back over the V-shape in the opposite direction. Still using the continuous pour, drag down from the end of the V to form the nose.

**7**



Using dry foam, form the shape of the mouth in a curve under the nose. At the top of the rosettas, form a C-curve with dry foam for the ear.

**8**



Use the dry foam to drop three dots for the crown. And finally, a dot between the V for the eye.

Images: Prime Creative Media.

## FRANÇOIS EASTLAND

K204, Eastland Shopping Centre,
171-175 Maroondah Highway, Ringwood,
Victoria, 3134
Open Monday to Wednesday and Saturday
8am to 5pm, Thursday and Friday 8am to
8.30pm, and Sunday 9am to 5pm

François has locations in Melbourne's Fountain Gate and Eastland, with a flagship set to open in spring 2025 in Mambourin.

Images: François.

James Meunier has an impressive CV. After moving from Mauritius to Australia in 2006, he began his hospitality education at the Hilton in Sydney on George Street, where he spent four years.

When he moved to Melbourne, James managed several venues for Shannon Bennett's Vue de Monde Group. After enjoying a final stint in hotels as Director of Operations at the Werribee Mansion, James joined forces with former Vue Group colleague Vy Mai to open their business.

François, with locations in Fountain Gate, Eastland, and a flagship set to open in spring 2025 in Mambourin, is a series of coffee kiosks dedicated to perfecting the basics and catering to the high foot-traffic in some of Melbourne's largest and busiest shopping centres.

"We've kept it simple and straightforward, with a strong focus on coffee," he says.

Although simple is the goal, James says the kiosks have a no-expense-spared fit out and a refined finish to resonate with the high-end retailers against the café's backdrop.

"During the planning and construction phase, we approach every detail with great consideration to ensure the setup not only enhances our speed of execution and delivery during peak service periods but also that the overall vibe lines up with the sophisticated environment we want to create," says James.

In terms of coffee, François serves a house blend crafted in collaboration with The Bean Cartel's Master Roaster Alan Chan.

"The profile we're working with is a full-bodied, medium roast, with a beautiful nutty, hazelnut finish," he says. "This is paired with 100 per cent Jersey milk sourced from the beautiful pastures of south-west Victoria, which not only leans into our sustainability ethos but also results in a velvety smooth and creamy end product."

Alongside its signature coffee blends, François serves single origins that change weekly.

François was established by former colleagues James Meunier and Vy Mai.

"We also offer cold brew and a variety of frappes, including honeycomb, chocolate, espresso, and mocha. On top of that, we have a great selection of local cold-pressed juices, milkshakes, smoothies, soft drinks, and iced beverages," says James.

The café menu also features traditional Vietnamese coffee, which combines condensed milk and Vietnamese beans, served warm or over ice with toasted coconut flakes.

To pair with its extensive coffee menu, François serves a selection of classic sandwiches using 48-hour sourdough. The collection includes the New York-style Reuben, Cubano, and Tuna Melt alongside a variety authentic New York bagels.

"We offer more than 20 varieties of cakes and cheesecakes, plus macarons, including a popular sticky date pudding that's served warm with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. It pairs perfectly with our milk-based coffees," he says.

Yet, James says one of the café's key selling points is its focus on people, particularly its team members.

"We invest heavily in their education and development within hospitality to ensure every guest leaves with a positive, memorable experience. Our approach to hospitality is rooted in the idea of offering guests the same care and warmth as if they were visiting our own homes – providing a clean space, the best seat at the table, a delicious meal, and a great bottle of wine. This is the foundation of our hospitality model," he says.

Staying from François' traditional coffee kiosk setup, the brand's new flagship in Melbourne's west will be a licensed venue, with a focus on brunch and cocktails.

"The new flagship will aim to further bridge the gap between the café culture between inner Melbourne to the West," says James.

### BESSA COFFEE

23 Little Cribb St, Milton,
Queensland, 4064
Open Monday to Friday 6am to 2.30pm

A tucked away gem, Bessa Coffee opened in 2016.

Image: Jodie De Pascali.

With two cafés already under his belt, Marcus Allison was in good stead to open the doors to Bessa Coffee in 2016.

Based in Brisbane's Milton Green, the kiosk coffee shop is in the heart of an urban jungle, nestled between office buildings and green spaces. With an established reputation in the city's café scene, Marcus had thought about opening a café in the area long before it became a reality.

Cycling between his two cafés, he would often take the path along the Brisbane River that would wind between Milton Green's commercial buildings.

"I had always thought the area between the offices would be the perfect spot for a coffee shop," says Marcus.

After learning of the redevelopment of the office precinct, all the cards fell into place.

"We started chatting with the owners of the office park, who already knew of our cafés. We worked with them to design Bessa and, once the development was complete, we were able to launch," he says.

Popular with both office workers and cyclists and walkers using the path, Bessa Coffee is an off-street café offering both dine-in and takeaway options. A keen advocate for supporting local businesses, Marcus' preferred coffee supplier is Sample Coffee in Sydney.

"We use their Pacemaker blend, but as a multi-roaster café we also have a feature grinder," he says.

From the Sunshine Coast to the Gold Coast, Bessa Coffee showcases local roasters in the Queensland area. Marcus finds that by mixing up the roasters, the café keeps a fresh and rejuvenated feel for Bessa's regulars.

"We almost always use single-origin coffee. We like to highlight different regions and processing methods," he says. "We also do batch brew and try to rotate through two feature single-origin espressos each week."

Accompanying the brews, the kiosk also serves house-made jaffles as well as pastries from the team's favourite local bakery, Sprout.

In line with championing local, the business also supports CaféSmart, an annual project that aims to unite roasters, cafés, and coffee enthusiasts around Australia to fight homelessness and support those at risk in their local area.

"Our aim is to be a company that has a greater impact beyond serving coffee," says Marcus.

"To see where the donations go in the local area really helps to feel as though we are making a difference. CaféSmart is a really positive industry-wide fundraising opportunity that's not just supported at a café level but also at the roaster level. The industry cooperation is amazing to see."

The 1995 team have helped make the space the success it is today.

Image: The 1995.

### THE 1995

2/35 Cavenagh Street, Darwin City,
Northern Territory, 0800
Open Monday to Friday 7am to 2.30pm,
Saturday 7.30am to 1.30pm, and Sunday
8am to 12.30pm

Which part of the café experience comes above all else? Is it the quality of the coffee, the chance to try new and exciting dishes alongside traditional café classics, or simply being welcomed into a vibrant and relaxed community?

At The 1995, it's a blend of all three. The success of the Darwin café is the culmination of Owner Reed Alanes' years of experience in the Filipino and Aussie hospitality industries. He's brought a dash of Filipino flair to one of Australia's fastest-growing café scenes.

"We try to be different from other cafés, whether that's around Darwin or anywhere in Australia," Reed says.

"We try to go against the grain and make our food not so typical. Of course we have the classics, but we're about to change our menu to add some Filipino dishes with an Australian twist.

An example of these fusion dishes is beef cheek kare-kare.

"It's a Filipino version of a curry, but we're mimicking the curry with a peanut sauce because we don't traditionally have those curry spices in the Philippines. It's one of my favourites," he says.

"We've sourced the beef cheek from Cape Grim in Tasmania, so we're trying to be different while keeping it simple with high-quality ingredients."

Over its three years in operation, The 1995 has become a thriving community hub in the Darwin waterfront precinct.

From its use of Padre specialty beans to support the Good Coffee Doing Good program, through to the team's strong desire to make everyone feel welcome at the café, the benefits of this small but mighty café are felt throughout inner Darwin.

"I was blessed to have been given permanent residency and citizenship here, so I feel a desire to give back to the community," Reed says.

"We have a tiny shop, but we're one of the busiest in Darwin because people know they will be welcomed and they're going to be comfortable.

"I feel like it is my responsibility to make everyone feel at home and looked after here, and to keep them as caffeinated as I can."

## CHARLOTTE CAFÉ FORESTVILLE

22 The Centre, Forestville,
New South Wales, 2087
Open Monday to Saturday 6am to 4pm,
Sunday 6.30am to 4pm

There are 14 Charlotte Café locations across New South Wales.

Images: Charlotte Café.

With 14 cafes in the New South Wales area under his belt, it's safe to say Charlotte Café Founder and CEO Jason Ghebar knows a thing or two about running a successful coffee business.

The latest addition to the collective is in Forestville, northern Sydney. Like its sister venues, Charlotte Forestville is weaving itself in the fabric of the local community. With a courtyard showered in bougainvilleas and jasmines, travertine paved flooring, and archways framing the ceiling, the café has its own unique style.

"I got into the business at the right time when I first opened Birchgrove 18 years ago," says Jason.

"After I opened my second café in Manly, I was on a roll. I had some great partnerships that developed along the way and realised I was capable of opening more shops. I got in at the right time and rode the wave."

According to the CEO, being able to build a successful café and then sustaining it is what business is all about.

"Consistency with your staff and your product is so important for the customer," he says.

"I also own some of the properties at our locations. I didn't want to have someone else in control of my destiny. It's been a real strength in the business. We have a lot of buying power, and a lot of negotiating power with our suppliers because of how strong we are."

Across his 14 cafés, for Jason choosing Campos Coffee as Charlotte's roaster partner was a no brainer.

"They are the most consistent and have offered me the most support in our business. They haven't put a foot wrong," says Jason.

"Businesses are built on the back of relationships. I could call Campos tomorrow and say I'm going to open another store and they'll say no problem, let's go, and all my equipment would be ready for me."

Having the right equipment for the operations of a café is paramount to not only the smooth sailing during opening hours but also the job satisfaction of the team.

"We do have the best equipment from Barista Group," says Jason.

"I think Joe [Chalhoub, Barista Group General Manager] is at the top of his game. We have a really good relationship and I've always told him I want to be a guinea pig. I respect what he does in the business. There aren't a lot of people with his knowledge and I'm glad to have that relationship with him."

The Forestville venue has been kitted out with equipment from Barista Group.

"I just love to have all the stuff and all the little gadgets because it helps with your staff who have to stand for seven hours a day," Jason says.

"Having state-of-the-art equipment can make all the difference."

As of May 2025, Charlotte Cafés can be found in Birchgrove, Manly, Pennant Hills, ATP – Eveleigh, Boronia Park, Cammeray, Lindfield, Balgowlah, Bondi Junction, Wollongong, Campbelltown, Drummoyne, and Forestville.

CHARLOTTE
Forestville

The new Forestville venue has been kitted out with equipment from Barista Group.

## LAIKA COFFEE

11 Lathlain Place, Lathlain
Western Australia, 6100
Open daily 6am to 2.30pm

Named after the first dog to go into space, Laika Coffee strives to be on the "frontier of the unknown".

Owners Darwin Jarrett and Ricky Singh acquired the business from its former owners in 2021 and have since expanded the Perth specialty café, gaining an enviable reputation for its house blends and emphasis on brunch.

With 10,000 customers passing through per week and a venue capacity of 250 people, Laika Coffee Venue Manager Ash Parnham puts her 15 years of hospitality experience to good use.

"It's hectic managing a place that holds 250 people," says Ash. "It's challenging, but very rewarding. We have a big team and on weekends we have about 17 front of house staff, not including kitchen staff.

"There are lots of inspiring individuals who work here that treat hospitality as a career."

The café sits opposite the West Coast Eagles oval, and footy and sports fans frequent the space pre and post match.

"The area is also full of young families. The café is very child friendly as we don't serve alcohol," says Ash. "We see a lot of corporates coming for lunch as well – there are lots of businesses in the area."

Mainly focusing on brunch, Laika delivers a modern Australian take on Asian cuisine. Popular dishes include the likes of sticky black rice pudding, chilli crab scramble, and kimchi mac and cheese croquette.

"We do a bit of everything and change seasonally," Ash says, "but lots of people just want eggs and coffee too."

To complement its brunch lineup, the team offer two house blends: Laika 1 and Laika 2.

"Laika 1 pairs well with full cream milk and Laika 2 pairs well with any alternative milks with low acidity," says Ash.

The team at Laika also rotate through single-origin coffees from roasters around Australia.

"We have a specialty espresso menu with some more exotic finds for people who want to try niche coffee," she says.

To craft the espresso menu, the baristas use La Marzocco's Strada and ModBar machines, which Ash says deliver quality and consistent results every time.

Laika Coffee is named after the first dog to go into space.

Image: Laika Coffee.

"The key to high-volume coffee is making sure everything comes out as expected," says Ash. "You can really tailor the Strada to match the coffee you want to brew. It's a fantastic machine.

"We have a pecking order at the café where we make sure everyone goes through the right training before we let them on the Strada. It's all about respecting the coffee and the machine."

PIGEON
WHOLE
BAKERS
Pigeon Whole Bakers puts pastry first, coffee second.

Image: Pigeon Whole Bakers.

## PIGEON WHOLE BAKERS

24-32 Argyle Street, Hobart,
Tasmania, 7000
Open Monday to Friday
7.30am to 3pm, Saturday and
Sunday 7.30am to 1pm

Dipping into a café, you might pick up a pastry alongside a coffee, but Hobart's Pigeon Whole Bakers is shifting that narrative.

"Our early idea was to be known as a bakery, not a coffee shop or café. We wanted people to come in and order a pastry and maybe think 'while I'm here, maybe I'll get a coffee'," Company Director Jay Patey says.

"People will subconsciously go somewhere for a coffee and maybe get a pastry as an add on, but we wanted to flip that and be really ingrained for being a bakery. Originally, we just served filter coffee. That still has a very strong following and we sell a lot of it alongside our espresso."

Although using high-quality, locally roasted beans from Villino Coffee Roasters alongside guest roast beans including Market Lane and Seven Seas, Pigeon Whole has maintained its status as a high-quality bakery that happens to have high-quality coffee to boot.

Its most popular bakery creation is an indulgent delight made with croissant pastry, cinnamon, cardamom, and local honey simply named 'the morning bun'.

Alongside its typical pastry and sandwich offerings, the morning bun ensures customers keep coming back to Pigeon Whole, whether they're locals from Hobart or interstate travellers.

"The morning bun is my favourite pastry. Even before I was working for Pigeon Whole I was coming in to grab one for breakfast," Retail Manager Mari Tomoshige says.

"It's lovely and caramelised at the bottom, but it's still nice and flaky with a real richness in the middle. It's everyone's favourite and I always recommend it.

"It's uniquely Tasmanian as well since we use Lake Pedder Nectar Honey from Miellerie Honey. The bun is well balanced with the cardamom, then when you get to the centre it's more unctuous and gooier. It's delicious."

With an entire storefront made from glass, customers can see exactly what goes into preparing every sandwich and pastry for the day.

"We have a visibility and transparency where people can see into the kitchen and watch our pastries being made from scratch, and it's a nice process for our customers," Jay says.

"That visibility is quite powerful. Yes, we're selling coffee, bread, and pastries, but we've got an amazing team that delivers our whole ecosystem around customer service so well."

# Christos Arsenis

Angus Marrickville's Co-Founder reflects on his hospitality origins, the key to a great venue, and what it takes to make it in the Sydney café scene.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** | **Christos Arsenis** |
| **Venue:** | **Angus Marrickville** |
| **Instagram:** | **@angusmarrickville** |

Image: Michael Malaga.

## Why did you get into hospitality?

About 10 years ago, I fell into the coffee industry by accident. I was studying law and finance at university and working at a small law firm that was closing down. I was told to find another job, so I started working at a café on campus because it was something quick and easy. About six months later, my local specialty café, White Horse Coffee in Sutherland, offered me a job. That was my introduction to specialty coffee. Over the next two or three years, I fell in love with the hospitality, the people, and the vibe. I finished my degrees but realised this was the career I wanted to pursue.

## What was the 'aha' moment that made you want to open your own venue?

I've always been pretty ambitious. I realised that if I was going to stay in this for the long haul, owning a café was the natural next step. It really sank in around 2017, when the person who trained me at White Horse opened his own café in Brisbane. He was about 28 at the time and I was 25. Seeing him do it made me think, "Okay, this is achievable". From that moment, I knew that owning a café was something I would eventually do.

## How do you make sure the venue stands out?

For me, the key is always good hospitality and good product, with a strong focus on community. From a product perspective, it's about offering something unique that you won't find at every café and doing it well while still keeping it approachable. On the hospitality side, it's about building relationships with your regulars, being a part of their lives. It's about genuinely connecting with people, providing great service, but keeping it casual and relatable. We don't want the experience to feel stiff or overly formal. I want people to come back every day, happy to see us, and for us to be a positive start to their morning.

## How would you describe the menu?

Being a café bakery, we draw a lot of influence from what we can pull out of the oven. One of the things we're known for is our focaccia. We've also been working hard on our bread and pastry offerings, which have evolved over time. We've got a solid core of products, especially our sourdough and laminated dough croissant-based items.

## What does a typical day look like for you?

I usually wake up at 5am, roll into work, and get the café ready for the day. I start by preparing our morning bake and set it up at the front of the shop. By the time we open, the kitchen team finishes off the baking and we dive into service. We're open from 7am to 3pm on weekdays and 8am to 2pm on weekends, so during those hours it's full steam ahead. Afterwards, everyone chips in with closing duties, cleaning, and paperwork – lots of fun stuff.

## Advice for those wanting to break into the café scene?

You're going to need a lot more money than you think you will. You really have to love it, because it's a lot of work. It's incredibly rewarding, though, and I'm finding it rewarding even though I'm working 80-hour weeks. Be prepared for it to be a slog for a while. It does get better, but you have to know what you're getting into and have the stamina to stick with it. Beyond that, having a good product is the price of entry. But also, just be good to people, be excited about your product, and what you're bringing to the market.

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